

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Thursday Evening, January 30, 1975

[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair at 8 p.m.]

CONSIDERATION OF HIS HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR'S SPEECH (continued)

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Henderson]

MR. HENDERSON:

Before I start, Mr. Speaker, would you mind telling me how much time I have left? I think it's about 10 minutes.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Five minutes only.

SOME HON. MEMBERS:

Two minutes.

MR. HENDERSON:

I am sure I made a mistake, Mr. Speaker. It must be 20 minutes.

MR. SPEAKER:

Possibly the hon. member could start and we'll put a sign on his desk in just a moment or two, as soon as the Clerk finds the record.

MR. HENDERSON:

That is what I am afraid of, Mr. Speaker. It will be just in a moment or two.

AN HON. MEMBER:

If you would like to negotiate I'll ...

MR. HENDERSON:

I would suggest the government devote its time and energy to negotiating on Syncrude. It might be more productive than negotiating with me.

We were discussing the amendment of the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, at the time of adjournment and I was commenting on the one element or one part of the motion which urges the government to take steps to restore confidence of investors in Alberta industry and commerce. I was speaking relative to that particular part of the motion as it concerns the Syncrude project, and suggesting that I could not in my own mind associate the problems Syncrude is having, with the arguments that somehow they relate to the actions on the part of the government for the last couple or three years in changing the royalty leases on conventional production.

I suggest again, Mr. Speaker, that I, in my own mind cannot associate the problem that Syncrude is having at all with the previous actions of the government in adjusting royalty rates. I think it is unrelated to that entirely. It is related entirely, on the other hand, to the actions of the federal government.

Looking at the actions of the government in the matter just very briefly, I pointed out that in my mind the government got into hot water as far as industry confidence was concerned with its original action in going through these public relations exercises on hearings where they expected industry to come before them and - I don't know what they expected - to urge the Legislature that we should put the taxes up on industry. I don't think anybody in his right mind goes before any body, public or private, and urges to have his taxes put up, whether it is a corporation or private citizen.

The government placed the industry in the role of an adversary for public relations purposes. When, a year later, it had to tear up the supposed five-year agreement, a great deal of consternation was naturally expressed. In my view it wasn't the second act, it was the first one that lay at the root of the problem. I have to think that anybody who is aware of the basic mechanism of how the royalties are looked at would have to agree.

I think there are two fundamental aspects to it. First, the royalty commitments that are made by government, regardless of who the government is, to private enterprise on oil and gas production for a period of ensuing years are based on certain assumptions relative to market conditions and the sale of crude oil. I know as sure as I am standing here that if the price of crude oil had gone from \$3.50 down to \$2.00 a barrel, the industry would be camping on the doorsteps of the Legislature and this assembly room pressing for a reduction in royalties, notwithstanding the royalty agreements that were supposed to be committed for five years.

I point out to the members the commitment, the exercise the previous administration went through, and the one which the new administration upheld, was the action on the part of the government reducing the royalty on Syncrude because of their financial troubles.

So I can't buy all these holier-than-thou statements about contract sanctity, whether they are coming out of industry or coming out of political circles. In my view, anybody in the industry who is honest enough to face the facts knew full well that when the price of crude quadrupled in Alberta, the royalty rates were not going to stand the same as they were. They had to be amended just as the industry would be pressing to amend them if the movement had been the other way and the price of crude had been cut in half.

I think anyone will have to admit that any government that had sat and watched the price of crude quadruple in the province of Alberta and had a royalty structure committed for a period of time based on certain assumptions relative to price, and those assumptions proved grossly inaccurate for reasons beyond their control, no government could be the Government of Alberta very long had they sat on their hands and preached sanctity of contract. It simply wouldn't stand up.

I supported the government in that action at that time and I support the action in retrospect of what the government did. I think any reasonable individual within the oil industry knew full well the royalty agreements had to be changed. I'm not surprised, on the other hand, that no one welcomed it, any more than they welcomed the opportunity to come before the Legislature in the first exercise and beg the Legislature to put their taxes or the royalty up. One would have to be extremely foolish to expect them to welcome it. But being realistic about it and welcoming it are two different things.

I have to say in fairness to the government, and as a reminder to the members on this side of the House, I think with one or two exceptions all the members on this side of the House supported that particular bill, too. So it was this Legislature that backed it. In my mind they had no choice in conscience but to back it as trustees of the management of the resources belonging to the people of the province of Alberta. That isn't to say the government certainly is to be congratulated on some of the things it has done in the past, because certainly some of the things they've done haven't encouraged investor confidence.

I mention again the first PR gain. I think last year the exercise of turning over gratis the Suffield Block gas reserves to a Crown corporation and freezing industry out completely of the opportunity to competitively bid on that lease, was certainly a step that did nothing whatever to encourage investor confidence in the Government of Alberta. But I'm satisfied, Mr. Speaker. I think the government has paid for its sins. In having to come back after the original hearings and do the responsible thing, I think they had to swallow a little bit of pride in that exercise and I congratulate them for acting responsibly in the matter when they did amend the royalty agreements. Similarly, I think the government redeemed itself when it took the action to reduce the royalties. While I'm not sure I might have been so generous - because the industry is going to take the money and spend it outside Alberta - none the less, nobody can argue it wasn't the action on the part of the Government of Alberta that didn't save the private enterprise oil and gas industry, not just in Alberta but in all of Canada, because I don't think there is too much doubt if the Province of Alberta had not acted, you would shortly see an end to private enterprise investment in the oil and gas industry in the entire Dominion of Canada. I think the Government of Alberta has paid its debts in that regard. I do not think anybody can thoroughly saddle them with the question of industry investor confidence in the Syncrude problems with which they are now faced.

That, Mr. Speaker, brings me to an item in last night's paper. In the years I've been in the House I haven't made too much of a habit of quarrelling with reporters' comments on my remarks. One of the occupational hazards of not using notes is maybe I didn't say what I meant to say, but I see in last night's paper I was quoted as saying the Government of Alberta shouldn't bail out Syncrude because it would be at the mercy of the consortium since it would have no control over inflation, cash flows, et cetera. If I left the House with that impression, I certainly apologize, because that isn't what I thought I was saying or certainly meant to say, but if I did, I would like to correct the record now.

While I feel very strongly that it would be absolute foolishness on the part of the Province of Alberta on its own to try to bail out Syncrude, I don't, on the other hand, suggest the Province of Alberta shouldn't take some initiative in proper circumstances. The main initiative and the main responsibility rests with the federal government. They are the ones who have the freeze on crude. They are the ones who refuse to enunciate any form of national policy which says Canada is going to be self-sufficient in crude oil. Instead they're building a pipeline from Sarnia to Montreal on the basis that if they haven't got oil they'll carry some western crude east for a while in it, and when they run out of Alberta oil, they'll use it to bring offshore crude into the Toronto market area.

Who on earth in his right mind - and I'd like to think most members of this House or all of us are in their right minds - would consider investing \$2 billion in a project such as Syncrude without any assurance whether it's going to take five or six years to build it, inflation is running rampant and you can't tell what the federal government is

going to do tomorrow on the question of crude prices or national oil policy, let alone tell ten years from now.

As I've said earlier, my only amazement is Syncrude has continued with the investment thus far before finally deciding to talk about throwing their gloves in. If anybody has the responsibility to bail out the Syncrude project and if it should be bailed out by a government in Canada, it's got to be the federal government.

I certainly would be in favor of the federal government stepping forth in the province of Alberta and making a commitment or contribution as a demonstration of faith in the project. In fact they should, at least in proportion to population.

As far as the federal government's argument that they don't have the money to put into it, they've collected more than a billion dollars of our money from the export tax. I find I can't quite follow the argument they haven't got a billion dollars to put into the tar sands project.

Certainly if the federal government was prepared to face up to its responsibilities, not so much to Alberta but to eastern Canada and a supply of crude on a long-term basis, it would be in order for Alberta to make a contribution at least on a proportionate population basis. But I say again, it would be absolute foolishness for the Government of Alberta to try to take the initiative on its own.

In the two minutes I have left, Mr. Speaker, I would like one last issue questioned, the action that a number of individuals are participating in in saying the industry is crying wolf. They wouldn't walk away and leave three or four hundred million dollars which they've already invested in the Syncrude project laying on the table or under the table and write it off. I think those people who have that mentality, if they stick to their guns and if that's what the federal government thinks, they're going to be sadly shaken. I just can't see Syncrude with any sense of responsibility from an investment standpoint proceeding without that type of commitment from the federal government.

I want to close by saying I think the Government of Alberta has to bear some responsibility for the position the industry finds itself in, relative to its credibility gap. It was the action of the government on the original hearings that put the industry to a large extent in its first position where they came before this Legislature, made certain statements about the dire consequences of putting the royalties up, which I think are not unreasonable under the circumstances. Of course nothing serious happened afterwards.

That was a credibility gap, I think, forced on them to a large extent by the action of this government in staging the original hearings and handling the matter in the manner they did. I think it would be a tragic error on the part of the politicians in this Assembly or in this province or the federal government, not to take seriously the threat being made to close down the project.

I close by repeating: the initiative must rest with the federal government. I would be absolutely opposed as a member of this Assembly and as a citizen of Alberta to seeing the Province of Alberta try to pick up the slack where the federal government has refused to face up to its responsibilities. With reasonable action of their part, I think everybody in Alberta would be agreed that we should do our share, but only under those circumstances.

MR. COPITHORNE:

It's a pleasure for me to be in on this debate tonight. I suppose this could well be the last speech I'll make other than on estimates in regards to my department and the amendment that the opposition has brought in.

First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment His Honour Ralph Steinhauer, a longtime friend born a short ride from the ranch. He is a successful farmer and cattleman. I want to congratulate him on the way he delivered the Speech from the Throne. Certainly [he is] one of the sons of the sod of Alberta and that has to be a first for Canada. We should all be proud of that.

[Applause]

I also want to congratulate the mover and seconder of the Speech from the Throne. They certainly did a very excellent job.

In starting on this debate, it is unfortunate that the opposition took such a position of doom and gloom and all the bad things that go with ... [interjections] ... well, I learned that line from you people and certainly I look at it. You are still carrying it on.

You know it's not that way at all, Mr. Speaker. There is a record to be proud of in this province, and each and everyone of you on both sides of the House are responsible for that. You know, my department is responsible for about \$50 million in special warrants that are being cried down in being passed by this government.

I can recall that in the estimates last year one of the hon. members opposite got up and said there wasn't enough money being spent on highways and there should be more. It was loudly applauded on both sides of the House. I don't think there are too many who would have very many disagreements with how the money has been spent throughout the province of Alberta.

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

MR. COPITHORNE:

We have many accomplishments in the department and I'm going to refer back not only to the achievements of the Department of Highways in the last several years and particularly this year, but also, Mr. Speaker, to the special warrants and investor confidence and the points which have been brought forth by the opposition.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the improved operators' licences that were issued in 1973; a first in Alberta, a colored photograph. This is virtually tamper-proof and certainly is a good identification document which is widely used. At the time it was not budgeted for. That had to be done by a special warrant to cover the extra cost.

MR. LUDWIG:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Aw, sit down.

MR. LUDWIG:

Shut up.

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The hon. minister, even though he states this may be his last, it doesn't permit him to violate the rules. He is not on the amendment, or the no confidence motion. He is not, and I am saying he isn't. It's nonsense. His speech is nonsense.

I want to make my point, Mr. Speaker. He is talking about drivers' licences in his own department. If he wants to review his own department at length he should speak on the main part of the debate on the Speech from the Throne and not on the nonconfidence motion. I am entitled to make this point of order. I think it's a valid objection. The minister should be put on the straight road again and he should stick to the topic before the House at the present time. Because he is saying it might be his last, it doesn't give him any leeway.

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, I'll continue now that we've had that dissertation from the person ...

MR. SPEAKER:

Order please. Does the hon. minister wish to say anything about the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Calgary Mountain View?

AN HON. MEMBER:

... it was nonsense.

MR. COPITHORNE:

This year, Mr. Speaker ...

MR. LUDWIG:

Objection. I would appreciate a ruling from you. I do believe he was not on the topic under debate at the present time. If he doesn't want to take issue with the point of order then I would expect a ruling from Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER:

The minister apparently isn't prepared to argue about the point of order. It remains to be seen whether his further speech would contravene that point of order.

MR. LUDWIG:

I don't know what the minister will say further. I object to what he already said and I think there ought to be a ruling on it. He does not get any dispensation in this House on the pretext that it's his last speech.

AN HON. MEMBER:

That was your last speech.

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, proceeding along in this ... we have made many changes in the administration which were probably new and popular as far as the people of Alberta were concerned. One of the areas that we moved in, and this was only able to be appraised by computers that are able to deal quickly with a large number of people, is the change of the requirements for senior citizens to have licences after the age of 70. We have reduced the requirement of a driver's test if they have a good record, but still require medical tests ...

MR. SPEAKER:

I regret very much having to interrupt the hon. minister but the hon. Member for Calgary Mountain View is entitled to invoke the Standing Orders and it is then the duty of the Speaker to apply them and the rules and traditions of the House with regard to relevance.

I must respectfully suggest to the hon. minister that if he continues along the lines in which he is now debating, he would be contravening the rule of relevance insofar as the amendment to the motion is concerned.

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, last June we passed in this Legislature a most comprehensive urban transportation policy. It was announced in the House, I think, about June 9. It had a very far-reaching effect on the planning abilities of Calgary, Edmonton and the other eight cities of Alberta. Part of this money, Mr. Speaker, had to be put by special warrant and it was known to both sides of the House at that time.

Mr. Speaker, it's amazing what a short memory some of the hon. members in this House have. Certainly at that time we dealt by special warrant with the transit deficits of the people of the urban centres, such as Calgary and Edmonton, on a per capita basis of \$3. This gives \$1.5 million, approximately, to Edmonton and Calgary to deal with their transit deficits.

Mr. Speaker, that has to do with some of the special warrants that were passed that the hon. members opposite are objecting to. I would tell you this, Mr. Speaker, in spite of that, that particular policy is popular with the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and throughout the province of Alberta.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Who organized municipal financing?

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, it has also given the opportunity for the cities to plan their transportation with that six-year policy, being able to assure the interest of the money in a bank account in which they can make long-range policies and planning that will certainly allow them to plan comprehensively and with common sense.

Mr. Speaker, again there was a \$2 million special warrant for the improvement districts. A great amount of this money was - and I don't think any members who have IDs in their constituencies - certainly it's unfortunate the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview is not here tonight that he could enjoy seeing how some of the money is being used. But, Mr. Speaker, that money was spent in extra building on roads throughout the IDs last winter, at a time when it looked like there might be a lot of trucks out of work. Again this fall we had as many as 1,300 trucks working, hauling gravel in place. [We were] able to make our program go forth in the summertime by having the crushed rock in place to augment the shortage of trucks that was very acute last summer when our paving and road building programs and the demands on those trucks were high.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, that kind of money was well-spent because a working nation is a nation that is producing and not being a liability on the rest of the country. Any part of the industry as scarce and as precious as the trucking industry is in Alberta certainly needs the support and vision of developing the maximum use out of it.

I can go on again, Mr. Speaker. In primary highway construction there was a \$22 million special warrant. But this was done in building the road to Fort McMurray. That's a significant development of 60 miles in one year, completely base coat. That has to be an engineering feat in itself, not only to my department but to the contractors who took part both in supplying the cement, which was in extreme shortage in the province, and base coating the road. Those people now have an excellent road to Fort McMurray where there is so much action and development going on.

That, Mr. Speaker, brings up another point, investor confidence. You know, Mr. Speaker, just the very fact this government has a policy of rural development, that policy has got the confidence in every village, in every town in Alberta, simply because there is a house being built in every village and every town in Alberta. That takes cement and that's why there's no cement for the builders of the roads. Mr. Speaker, about investor confidence, every rural Albertan, every Albertan in every city, town and village has that confidence to build their homes here in Alberta. What more could you have - and also the confidence in the government and what they are doing.

Mr. Speaker, a \$4 million special warrant for secondary roads. I don't think there is a member in this House who would dare stand up and say that that shouldn't have been spent because it might have been in his constituency.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Agreed.

MR. COPITHORNE:

It may have been in his constituency. It may have added money to the industries that the members' constituents are involved in. It might have added a comfort and a better quality of living; to get to where that village or town is located. It also may have added a great deal to the development of the whole economy of Alberta somewhere, some place, at some time last year. So that point, Mr. Speaker, has a very slight validation, very slight, and I don't know who is going to agree with it.

Mr. Speaker, another special warrant of \$900,000. This is for the salary pool. Our department this year placed a large number of people, as I recall in horseback figures about 1,800, from wages to salaried positions. Mr. Speaker, some of these people had been on salaries for around 20 years. They are now on salaries where they should be and are being properly paid. And I don't think there's a member on either side of the House would

disagree with that kind of management as well. Because you have to be fair when you are dealing with people generally.

AN HON. MEMBER:

All the time.

MR. COPITHORNE:

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there is the odd member in the House who wouldn't deal that way and he's always mumbling to himself.

Mr. Speaker, this department would look pretty silly if in some of the programs of highway development we called 'whoa' in a bad spot. We've been faced with increasing costs with a program that has been unequalled in highway development in this province or anywhere in the country.

We have just finished building a very comprehensive program which develops the motor transport industry in this province. It is one that is most important to Alberta because of our landlocked position; because of our inability to have access to the ocean and take advantage of that kind of shipping.

We are threatened with the removal of railway tracks. Consequently we need to have a good communication system throughout Alberta. We have moved strongly in this area, Mr. Speaker, first in bringing about a prorate system with the Province of British Columbia and coming now with the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba and some 30 states in the United States.

We have also been able to persuade the ICC in the United States to allow our truckers an equal opportunity for having our trucks haul our products into the United States and back with products of import and trade. This has been a major breakthrough because the imbalance was about 30 to 1 - 30 American trucks in Alberta to the one Canadian truck authority in the United States. Mr. Speaker, these holes are being filled up.

Another area that we have moved in is the area of licensing, the area of medical standards. We were able to perform and to persuade the provinces of Canada to adopt a single medical standard which has saved the trucking industry a lot of paperwork and certainly has enabled them to work freely in that area.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the gross vehicle weight has been increased to 110,000 pounds. This is a great saving to all the consumers of Alberta in this area. These are very good accomplishments certainly.

We have entered into an agreement with the federal government on a shared cost, which will amount to about \$10 million a year, in strengthening the highways of Alberta to be able to cope with this 110,000 pound maximum weight.

Another area that we have moved strongly in is the street improvement program in Alberta. This has been most helpful in making rural Alberta communities, villages and towns good places to live. It is a popular program, Mr. Speaker, and there have been well over 120 towns throughout Alberta to date which have taken advantage of this program. There has been approximately \$4 million spent on it and it will be carried on further in the coming year.

The towns are doing it in such a way, are being well-planned because it is a long-range program. In this area we will probably be passing special warrants, perhaps in the future, to subsidize some of the money that has been lost by inflation. We are monitoring this carefully, and hope to be able to help those towns that feel they have been gypped because of the devaluation of money in the last few years, the erosion of it. Mr. Speaker, if such a warrant were passed, I am sure the hon. members would support it because of the need throughout the province of Alberta.

In 1974 the rural municipal grants were increased to almost double. Mr. Speaker, this has allowed them to develop dust control on the roads, to preserve their gravel that they ground in the wintertime. The special warrants that were passed by this government have allowed a lot of work to get done.

In 1974 in this province the counties were able to oil and re-oil 2,005 miles of local roads. In addition, 1,197 miles of secondary roads were oiled last year. In all, 6,923 miles of secondary and local roads have been oiled during the last three years, Mr. Speaker. With the shortage of trucks, the policy of crushing gravel in the wintertime ... Yes, the money was obtained by special warrant, but we were able to complete approximately 89 per cent of the road programs that we set out to do throughout the province. During those three construction periods, 998 miles of secondary roads were graded, 4,221 miles have been gravelled, 2,213 miles have been oiled and 409 miles have been paved. This is an important accomplishment, Mr. Speaker, when you think that some of the paving crews were operating with as few as four trucks. The primary roads in Alberta are the best in North America.

This an accomplishment to the foresight of the engineers who work in the department because in this province we enjoy luxuries that are shared nowhere else in the world: more paved roads per capita than anywhere else in the world, more paved roads with shoulders that can be used for safe parking if your automobile breaks down or walking or bicycling - all the qualities that other parts of the world are still striving for.

In the last three years of the construction season we've been faced with cement shortages. Mr. Speaker, we received 55,000 tons of cement this year when we could have used 86,000 tons.

MR. LUDWIG:

Backus hoarded it all.

MR. COPITHORNE:

That, Mr. Speaker, in itself is an indication of investor confidence because the three cement companies in this province produced more cement than ever before.

Our extensive program, in spite of the handicaps we were faced with, added 601 miles of paved highway this year, 495 miles of new grading and 647 miles of oil treatment. You add these figures all together, Mr. Speaker, ...

MR. LUDWIG:

All on special warrants.

MR. COPITHORNE:

... you get 3,049 miles of new paved road or oiled primary-secondary roads that did not exist here three years ago, but entirely built with provincial funds.

A few of the major highway projects completed are: the MacKenzie Highway 35 paved to within 100 miles of the Northwest Territories; McMurray Highway 63 hard surfaced to Fort McMurray, 60 miles of new paving; the David Thompson Highway No. 11 almost finished -

about 20 miles to be paved in the coming year and, Mr. Speaker, the crushing for that is going on at this very minute. A first-class entry into the United States on Highway 48 in the southeast part of the province which will be extending Highway 41, will be under paving contracts to be completed in the next year to two years depending on the amount of equipment and supplies available. We also, Mr. Speaker, will likely, if the supplies and equipment are available, be able to complete the grading on Highway 41.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Hear, hear.

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, I hear the right kind of noises coming from the other side. Even some of those ... [interjections] ... in spite of their prejudice are applauding. Highway No. 1 was improved to a four-lane standard from Calgary to east of Strathmore. On Highway No. 2 the last gap of paving between Kinuso and High Prairie is completed.

In addition we have paved approach roads to 22 towns, all approach roads to another 12 towns and paved roads into 12 more provincial parks and all roads into 4 more parks. We've done a great deal of grading and reconstruction at locations too numerous to mention.

MR. WILSON:

How many miles of roads from Banff to Cochrane?

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member from Didsbury, Carstairs or 'Pomona' complaining the other day about special warrants. You know, Mr. Speaker, I was wondering which one he would have liked us to cut out: building the interchange at Didsbury, a very accident-prone one or the one at Carstairs, a very accident-prone one. Mr. Speaker, the \$22 million which were put in special warrants, some of that money may have found its way into those interchanges. Or maybe the one at De Winton or maybe the one on Highway No. 16 at Wabamun Park or Wabamun Beach or Stony Plain or Devon corner, at Hinton or at Edson. Mr. Speaker, I can go on for quite a long time but I see I have only one minute left.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Hurry up. Carry on, we'll hear you.

MR. COPITHORNE:

Mr. Speaker, the areas we've been highly concerned with are areas of accidents and these interchanges should help. Great separations with the railway should help. We have a tremendous number of them in this province. It's going to take a lot of money and time to get that done. We've also started a driver education program this summer that's going like a house afire. Every young driver who never has, takes formal driving education. This is a driving policy developed by motor trainers, by the department and the AMA throughout Alberta, consisting of ten hours of classroom instruction and ten hours behind the wheel. The insurance companies endorse this policy. They've endorsed it to the point where they'll give 40 per cent reduction to young people who graduate from this course in the first year, 30 per cent the second year and 15 per cent in the third year. Mr. Speaker, it's not costing the government anything in special warrants, this one. It's one of free enterprise. It's one that's sound monetary...

AN HON. MEMBER:

Right!

MR. COPITHORNE:

... and certainly has investor confidence.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Atta boy, Clarence.

MR. COPITHORNE:

It's a long minute, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the time of the House. Mr. Speaker, the forestry trunk road was built primarily to look after our great natural resources and timber wealth the length and breadth of the western side of our province. I guess most of the Albertans at some time or another have driven on these roads, and enjoyed the beauty and tranquility that exist in those areas. Last year our bridge people were asked to evaluate the safety of the bridges. It was discovered they weren't in very good shape. Rather than close them down, we put on a crash program of looking after these bridges and working them all winter.

Mr. Speaker, this also involved a special warrant. Mr. Speaker, it involved a special warrant of \$4.5 million.

AN HON. MEMBER:

It was well-spent.

MR. COPITHORNE:

We built those bridges - the main ones - and are still working on it. It has made that road safe for people to continue as well as the commerce that has developed in many of the areas of hauling logs and whatever may go over those areas. Those people can travel in safety.

I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, if those roads had been closed because of the unsafety of the bridges, the people of Alberta would have had a hard time agreeing with not passing a special warrant to build those roads.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your indulgence for giving me the long minute. Certainly I have a speech prepared that would have carried on for a great deal of time. I know it would have been informative to the House, and I appreciate their indulgence. I wish everybody in this House success in the future. If you don't bring good legislation out of it, you'll find I'm not in retirement but I'll be ... [inaudible] ...

[Applause]

One of the things I know for sure is that I am retiring. Some of the rest of you might suspect it. After the election is over some of you will know for sure.

Thank you very much.

MR. RUSTE:

Mr. Speaker, on a point. My understanding at closing this evening was that we are through with the debate at 8:45. I beg leave to adjourn the debate.

MR. SPEAKER:

May the hon. member adjourn the debate?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

GOVERNMENT BILLS AND ORDERS
(Second Reading)

Bill 4 The Medical Profession Act, 1975

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in moving for the first time second reading of Bill No. 4, The Medical Profession Act, 1975; and for the second time Bill No. 64, 1974 The Medical Profession Act. I put it that way, Mr. Speaker, because this is a bill which is familiar to all hon. members. Indeed, in November 1974 it was the subject of a debate, perhaps too brief considering the importance and magnitude of the bill. It did not get final reading at that time.

I wanted to note now, Mr. Speaker, apart from indicating to hon. members that the bill is the same one they have already become familiar with last year. I noted in looking over the debate at that time that it was accorded very general support by members of the House on second reading. Just in passing, I noted that after my own remarks the hon. Member for Little Bow followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Kingsway both gave it their endorsement. Of course, there were many others. In view of the familiarity of hon. members with the provisions of the bill, I didn't want to spend any particular time on it in moving second reading. I do think it is fair, however, to note there were three or four points of principal concern or interest in the bill. I should just outline what those are for hon. members this evening.

First of all, the bill includes provisions which relate to the internal and external discipline of members of the profession and do change the self-government within the profession to some extent bringing it fairly close, in my judgment, to the well-supported provisions of The Legal Profession Act which was looked upon by the Legislative Committee.

on Professions and Occupations, chaired by the hon. Member for Edmonton Norwood, as about as good a set of rules in regard to professional discipline as had been found in legislation.

I mentioned that it dealt also with the professions' relationship with the public and would recall for hon. members that it would be the first occasion under legislation relating to a profession that has its own act, in any event, whereby it has been specifically provided that members of the public must be included on the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. That of course is the principal executive body of the profession in the province.

Of relative importance in even a national perspective remain the other provisions in regard to professional medical assistance. I mention them again in particular in a very broad way because several of the provincial jurisdictions over the last couple of years have been wondering how to approach this particular issue. I believe there is now legislation in at least one or two other provinces where medical assistance or paramedical professional personnel are utilized. It is, admittedly, to some extent an area that still requires a lot of further revolution but one we think the professionals and the secondary or post-secondary educational institutes in the province of Alberta are ready for. Hon. members will remember that, through SALT in Calgary some time ago, we graduated the first group of people who would fit under the category of professional medical assistants, those being the emergency medical technicians.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that another important part we wanted to point out to hon. members, so they will recall that it's there in the bill, is the change in the registration of physicians in the province and the taking away of the historic but probably outdated reciprocity provisions with many other jurisdictions.

We had some discussion of that in the last Legislature. Some of the concerns there related to physician supply and that sort of thing and the possibility that doctors with certain qualifications from other jurisdictions would no longer be admitted to practice in Alberta, whereas they had been in the past, because the act would require them to pass the tests of the Medical Council of Canada. We did discuss that and I wanted to recall for the hon. members that the proposal there is that the by-laws of the society, which must be approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, will deal with that in a way that will in fact continue to allow the admission of foreign doctors and will allow a period of up to two years for the taking of the LMCC examination on two separate occasions. It was on that basis we thought we could look at the prospect of bringing in that particular requirement and doing away with the reciprocity provisions. They were perhaps a great convenience to the doctors who were able to utilize them from other jurisdictions but are certainly not required for a medical practice to function fully and adequately in the public interest in the province of Alberta.

So those were some of the issues, Mr. Speaker. When the House reaches the committee stage on this bill, if we have matters of detail that I have not touched upon in this rehashing of my remarks of a few months ago, I would be glad to try again at that time.

MR. LUDWIG:

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the hon. minister for an excellent job on a bill. The fact that this bill was before the public, before the hon. members for a while, and requires no amendments is an indication of how good a job he did.

But I want to make one observation, though, that this is major legislation and it's a departure from what has been done before. It may affect future legislation dealing with other professions. For that reason I hope we don't have to be faced again with the situation where a bill of this significance and scope and the fact that it affects so many people - that legislation like this ought not to be brought into the House on the last couple or three days of the session. It isn't fair and I feel fully justified in having stalled that bill in spite of the fact that I have the highest regard for the hon. minister. We ought to be given an opportunity to review legislation like this to see whether we might have some input into it.

I had an opportunity of discussing this with some people who are affected and they believe it's a very good bill. But no one is so infinitely wise that he can foresee everything. Quite often very major and well-prepared legislation does need to be amended.

I wish to commend the minister but I would also like to urge the government not to put us in the position again where we are simply being taken for granted. I know they have studied this bill on the other side. They must have because they did a good job. But to say because we studied it on the government side that it doesn't matter whether the other side gets an opportunity to do anything with it ...

I just wish to express full confidence in the minister's bill and in the principles that he explained to us tonight. Also I hope that this will be a forerunner of legislation that deals with other professions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PAPROSKI:

Mr. Speaker, I also consider it an honor to be able to participate in this debate on second reading of The Medical Profession Act, 1974, then Bill 62, and now The Medical Profession Act, 1975, now being Bill 4.

Mr. Speaker, we know this, as a major rewrite of The Medical Profession Act, in its present form indeed merits acknowledgment of a number of people, mainly members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Alberta Medical Association, Dr. Le Roy le Riche who is the registrar of the college, government of the day, the minister and many others.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, indeed it was a pleasure and an honor to have participated also on input in this new Medical Profession Act, 1975. It's a special entity to me, being a medical doctor of course, and a legislator.

Mr. Speaker, hon. members, there are a number of points just to recap - and I don't intend to speak long on this item because I made those points, I believe, in 1974 - regarding this particular bill.

The important departure, as has been stated by the minister, requested by the medical profession is that the general public will now be on the council. The important point here, of course, hon. members, Mr. Speaker, is that there will be increased assurance that the public and the public's interests will be protected and/or maintained and/or increased. There will also be members from The University of Alberta and the Universities Co-ordinating Council on the council and this will, of course, increase communication, cooperation and coordination between that very important entity.

Mr. Speaker, regarding registration, the item that I see as a new thrust of special interest to the public is the Professional Medical Assistant Register under Section 26 in Bill 4. It is Section 26. I'll have something more to say on that. This will, I feel, Mr. Speaker, assure that standards are met in areas of the so-called professional medical assistant. This is specifically relating to the ambulance attendant who is to be trained, or is being trained or is trained now, and to maintain this individual at an acceptable uniform standard across the province in this very important area, doing those things, Mr. Speaker, that the medical doctor does well and can do possibly as well or so close to the medical doctor that in fact it is acceptable - a quality and a standard that is vital when these people are dealing with life and death phenomena.

The last item, Mr. Speaker, I wish to comment on is the LMCCs which is the Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada, which will be mandatory for foreign graduates and does away with a very important item. That is, it does away with discrimination against our own Canadian, Alberta graduates, who, in the majority of cases, write this examination and, in fact, can practise across Canada subject to being licensed in any given province.

Foreign graduates come to this province and to this country and will register and have a period of approximately two years to write this examination which is also titled as LMCCs. If they fail, they have at least two other occasions to write the examination totally. If they still fail then they must go into a retraining program.

Mr. Speaker, I mention this and quote a statistic that is I think, vital for the hon. members to recognize. In Alberta, of 147 graduates from our two schools - that is Calgary and Edmonton - four failed, a 2.8 per cent failure rate of our homebred graduates. However, of the foreign graduates, there was a failure rate of 35 per cent. So there is an obvious need, Mr. Speaker, to maintain a standard and focus on the importance of acceptable standards. LMCC is one way and is recognized around the world. Many countries really envy Canada for having this particular medical examination.

Mr. Speaker, there is an argument about foreign graduates not being allowed to Alberta and, as a result, we may become underpopulated with respect to medical doctors. The point here is that 39 per cent of foreign graduates are in Alberta, 33 per cent of foreign graduates are in British Columbia where LMCC is mandatory, 35 per cent of foreign graduates are in Ontario where LMCC is mandatory. There is only a 4 per cent gap between, for example, Alberta and Ontario. In Alberta it is not mandatory at this juncture and in Ontario it is. In spite of the mandatory provisions, this is not a major deterrent of foreign graduates coming to Alberta. The concern of not allowing foreign graduates because LMCC would be mandatory does not really hold that much water.

The other important item is that very special foreign graduates - foreign graduates who have a high-powered speciality that might be needed in the province of Alberta and some of these graduates, of course, are rare - won't have to necessarily take the LMCC examination in that they are in a very narrow specialty and they can very well do their work in that area in a facility and be monitored by the associated doctors.

Mr. Speaker, the monitoring, the registration, the discipline and the amplified, clarified improved mechanisms throughout the bill certainly merit support by all members of the Assembly.

[Mr. Diachuk in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, to zero in on one expressed concern I've received since this bill was initially introduced in 1974: this is the concern regarding the professional medical assistant and it's mainly from the nurses with regard to that area. The professional medical assistant as I see it as defined in this bill - and I think the minister would agree - is a person who can do the same things medical doctors do and can do them either as well or so close to the level of the medical doctor that it would be acceptable by society as a whole and the medical profession. Most people would agree, and I think have agreed, behind every medical doctor there is not only a good woman but some 15 or 20 back-up supported health professionals. This is really needed if a medical doctor is to function well because of time frame and the number of patients he has, and the different circumstances. In the area of prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and teaching, whether it be physical, mental or social aspects of the individual, support staff is needed.

Now the professional medical assistant is one type of support staff. The key issue is that education, training, standards, monitoring, expertise and experience are all needed for this type of individual. Who is to do it? Society expects these people are the best that can be provided. The basic issue is control and monitoring of these types of

individuals. The question is how, and what is the reaction of say, the nursing association with respect to this section.

Mr. Speaker, this section is attempting to clarify exactly that. A specific type of medical, professional medical, or medical assistant, I am confident it will satisfy that area at least initially.

The medical assistant in this section is specifically, and I repeat, specifically, intended to deal with the emergency technician and more specifically, the ambulance attendant who must be trained and experienced and be monitored to deal with those things in the ambulance when he deals with first line, first life threatening situations for the ill and injured anywhere in Alberta. As the minister has indicated, a training program is going on at SAIT now in the province of Alberta. There may be some modifications as a result of this and the input from the medical profession.

That first life line of treatment, when this professional medical assistant or attendant will be working, is so vital and important that they have to be defined and also monitored so that there will be no misunderstanding and as a matter of fact, they will be within their legal rights to do what they are doing. Thus the individual comes to the entire health team in the hospital or what have you.

This is not to say that the other health professionals are not serving in a similar manner in different circumstances, for example, the emergency hospital nurse, the nurse practitioner, the nurse midwife, et cetera, et cetera - even the social worker who may be operating or working in the AID line to contact people who have a social or psychological or emotional problems.

So this new type of assistant who will thus hopefully evolve, Mr. Speaker, will be well-trained, well-experienced for ambulance work. He may be experienced and knowledgeable in other areas, in special areas that may be defined and yet not defined at this time. The background may very well be a nurse. It may very well be a Bachelor of Science degree student. It may be a medical doctor for that matter, who chooses to work as an ambulance attendant.

So to relieve the fears of the nursing profession and specifically the [School] of Nursing at The University of Alberta - and I received a very comprehensive letter from Ruth McClure, who is the Director of Nursing there - and to assure her and the [school] and the nursing association across this province that the intent is to apply to just this type of assistant who will work in an ambulance and will be at the scene to treat the injured and the ill.

They of course lack the monitoring and the educational standards that are clearly defined initially, and yet they need this now. We need this now as a society, across the province. Yet they do not at this juncture have a mechanism to do just that. This is the mechanism as prescribed in this act. I suggest that this has to be satisfied immediately and will be if this bill is passed.

So the nursing association can be assured that the intent is to bring in appropriate legislation in the future to safeguard their concerns. I have discussed this with the minister and the minister has agreed with this intent: the legislation for the nursing association, if necessary, or wherever necessary, to ensure that they as a body will maintain their freedom without extraordinary influence, but rather have communication and sharing of their experiences and expertise and knowledge; that they as an association and as a faculty of nursing will be able to continue to develop their special expertise as registered nurses, as nurse practitioners, as nurse midwives, in programs and entities in their own right.

I would also like to recommend and do recommend that possibly, as the [School] of Nursing at The University of Alberta has suggested, a body, a board, an interdisciplinary health commission, be set up to deal with the various and significant matters pertaining to additional and newer health workers in areas of registration, discipline, licence, and whatever the future may hold.

So, Mr. Speaker, the concerns that the nursing association has expressed I hope will be clarified by my remarks and I have the assurance of the Minister of Health and Social Development, so if there are any other questions, I am sure they will be treated as any other health professional group should be.

There is only one other and last concern very briefly, Mr. Speaker, and that is the word "profession" as applied to the professional medical assistant. It has been recommended that this be removed as this new entity really does not have the criteria of being called a "profession". Certainly I don't have any objection to removing the word if the minister does agree at this time.

I certainly think the word "profession" should be restricted to a traditional group which has, after many years, an administration, a monitoring system, an educational system, a licensing system, a disciplinary system and proven established performance and responsibility over a number of years to society. Not to say the professional medical assistant or the medical assistant will not do that, I think there might be some doubt whether they should be called professionals at this juncture.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

MR. R. SPEAKER:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make one or two remarks with regard ...

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:

The hon. Member for Little Bow followed by the hon. Member for Norwood.

MR. R. SPEAKER:

However, Mr. Speaker, I would be most pleased to allow the lady to speak first, if she so desires.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:

The House agrees that the hon. member does not lose his turn. He has not debated it.

MRS. CHICHAK:

Mr. Speaker, before I embark on the remarks I'm going to make relating to this bill, I would like to commend the honorable gentleman for conceding the floor to me. But as my eye cast across the floor, I don't think the honorable gentleman was standing when I was up. Nevertheless I wish to thank him for this privilege.

MR. CLARK:

I suggest you be thankful for small mercies.

MRS. CHICHAK:

I had intended to make somewhat different remarks initially with regard to this bill before the House, Bill 4. But I've had to make a very quick change in the direction that my remarks will take as a result of some of the comments the hon. Member for Edmonton Kingsway made. A few of them somewhat disturbed me when he gave certain assurances as to what the medical council, the medical profession may do or the actions they may take or may not take with regard to the powers being given to them under this act.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton Kingsway may be speaking or giving those assurances as a member of that honorable profession and individually in the influence he may have over the profession. I am somewhat concerned when he gives such strong assurances to the related health field groups on behalf of all the legislators here. I'm a little upset about that. I think the bill before us is a very good one, but there are certain areas I would say we need to observe as to the actions of the medical profession, which I believe will constantly be honorable and in the best interests of the public. Nevertheless, they deserve some observation. I cannot go so far as to say I join my honorable colleague in the extensive assurances he makes with regard to the actions of the professional group itself.

I would like, - inasmuch as I agree and will support the bill - to raise for the hon. minister a couple of areas or just a few areas that need to be borne in mind perhaps in the future in the observation of how this legislation will be carried out by the profession. I feel perhaps the matter of not including in the definitions what really the medical profession or the College of Physicians and Surgeons intend to mean by the term "professional medical assistant" leaves a void in really giving the public an understanding of what they might expect in the way of service, and where perhaps such individuals might exceed the privileges they might be given or trained for. Perhaps at this early stage it was not possible to define so clearly what was intended by the professional medical assistant but if it was as simple as my honorable colleague from Edmonton Kingsway indicated that what he interpreted it as meant, I don't know why it is not then in the bill unless there are further questions. If it's so easy to define the role of the assistant, then it ought to have been in this bill.

With regard to the appointment of members from the general public, I am pleased that the profession has perhaps heeded some of the expressions and concerns of the report put forth by the Committee on Professions and Occupations. I have this observation to make with respect to that. Inasmuch as I commend them for it, the selection of the members of the general public will be made by the profession itself without any consultation, with perhaps the Lieutenant Governor in Council or the minister. I wonder how secure the public will feel in those appointments. I'm only raising it, I'm not questioning as to whether this will be carried out in an honorable way. I'm only questioning whether the public will feel as secure with the method that has been chosen here as the profession feels it is providing the assurance to the public.

Another area, with regard to establishing a new field - the professional medical assistant - we can see on the horizon and in the very near future even more groups in the health field that will be providing varied types of medical services. This will continue to expand. Inasmuch as at this time I agree it was necessary to bring about extensive changes to update The Medical Profession Act, I would hope it is with the understanding that if we find - and I am of the opinion that we ought to find in the near future - that truly we'll have to deal legislation covering the whole area of the health disciplines and come up with legislation, one piece of legislation, that will deal with all of it in order to cope with and have the flexibility in the types of services that are necessary by the different levels of workers and special training. I would hope the medical profession will understand and recognize that by this Legislature passing this bill at this date, if in fact it will, they will not hold themselves outside any contemplated future legislation that would want to bring it under one total umbrella health bill. I'm only raising this to be kept in mind. I would ask the minister to convey that message to the medical profession, that there must be this understanding. I expect I would have the concurrence of the majority of the members with respect to that particular area because I believe it is very important.

We are embarking on a very wide area of health services because of necessity and because of the better life we feel that we as Albertans must have. We must bear in mind that nothing we do today will be taken and understood to be so unique to any one

particular group that they might not be included with other groups, given the kind of respect they of course would merit.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. R. SPEAKER:

Mr. Speaker, I made other remarks in the 1974 session with regards to this bill. I would like to say I have a number of questions on specifics I would like to ask in Committee of the Whole.

I would appreciate the minister making comment - and two other members in the Assembly have mentioned that already - with regard to the definition of the medical assistant. I think the concern which comes back to me from various groups is what would be the status of other professional groups. They sort of ask the question: is our profession going to be subservient to this act and will we, in time along the line, be defined as professional medical assistants. I think one example certainly is the nurses. We have sort of clarified it verbally here in the Assembly. But is there any way that these groups can be guaranteed protection from that kind of thing happening? I think that is mainly the concern that has been raised with me. There are other specifics which I do have to raise in Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HENDERSON:

I just want to offer one or two brief comments on the basic subject of the professional medical assistants but on a somewhat broader basis. I can understand the concerns expressed by some members in this regard. I must admit to having a somewhat divergent viewpoint and I wouldn't want the comments of the hon. member Mrs. Chichak to be mistaken for my views because, very clearly, they aren't. So when the minister starts to speak to anybody in the profession I would like him to point out that I have some other viewpoint on the subject. I think we want to be cautious about advising the minister to speak for the Legislature.

One of the very major difficulties the health department and the government are going to face is the increasing scramble by all sorts of groups within the field of health services to have professional recognition. I think it would be a calamity on the part of the taxpayer to have another professional body, set up on a level comparable with the medical profession, that has the freedom and power to exercise control over the cost of the system, such as is now the case with the medical profession. I am not being critical of that, but that's a fact.

I think the more professional bodies we set up, the more pressures there are going to be to have them recognized for direct payment on contract or fee for service basis. We have the psychologists clamoring for that right now. We have the physiotherapists clamoring for that type of treatment now. I think it would be a major mistake on the part of the government to even consider that type of development.

In my view, what is really needed, of course, is one central body. There is nothing new about the problem. The motion that was set up to establish the committee on the professions, of course, was aimed specifically at that problem because you could see it coming four or five years ago or longer. I am somewhat surprised at the view of the hon. Member for Edmonton Norwood who spoke prior to Mr. R Speaker commenting on the need for a committee to look into the problem because that is exactly what that committee was for: to try to deal with and head off some of the clamor by all these various competing pressure groups within the medical services for professional recognition and individual status.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

DR. PAPROSKI:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

MR. HENDERSON:

I'm not referring to the hon. Member for Edmonton Kingsway, Mr. Speaker. I am referring to the other Edmonton member who spoke. I ought to look her seat up here but the seat I admire isn't the one that's under her so I won't bother going on that. That was just an aside that wasn't supposed to be heard, Mr. Speaker.

I am concerned, and have been concerned ever since I was Minister of Health. I say quite bluntly that the campaign on the part of the nursing profession to carve out for itself, within the medical health services, the same sphere of influence, prestige and prerogatives that the medical profession enjoys - they are very clear on that.

On the one hand I am not surprised and on the other I am about hearing of the nursing profession being concerned about the intentions of the medical profession in this regard. I think it is somewhat fitting to hear them express it because when we tried to set up a nursing council, they were the ones who were trying to foist all their ideas off on all the other groups which they felt should be subject to their direction and control. As it was, it completely prevented the establishment of a nursing council which would try to weld or meld those particular interest groups together, bring them under one body and stop some of the infighting, conflicts and scramble for professional status amongst the different groups. The more of them there are, the worse it is going to be for the public.

I think the Legislature is going to have to resist the temptation to yield to political expediency by granting professional status to all these individual groups. I don't think it's in the public interest to have them competing with one another.

I, for one, would have to say I think a policy of placing much of the guidance and direction under the jurisdiction of the medical profession is a sound one. Right now you can't walk off the street into a physiotherapist's and get all sorts of things done to you, just because you'd like to have them done and he'd like to do them. You have to do it on a reference basis from a physician. I think this is sound.

I think the prerogatives the chiropractors have are probably being stretched a little bit further than they should be. Every one of these professional groups the Legislature sets up, as soon as they are set up the next step is to have individual recognition of a fee-for-service basis. In the long run it's simply not in the best interests of the taxpayer, or the member of the public whether he's a taxpayer or not, to have all these competing groups pressuring the government for that type of consideration, pressuring the government for individual statutes.

I think the bill is a sound one and contrary to the fears which have been expressed on the part of some of the other groups, I would hope Section 26 in the act will serve as a tool to try to bring all of these groups, or as many as possible, under one overall council of some sort. If it isn't done in a manner such as that, sooner or later the government is going to have to take the initiative, set it up and run it itself.

I think with the long-established tradition of delegation - and it is a matter of delegation - the medical profession doesn't have any privileges or prerogatives this House doesn't grant it in this legislation. I think they, on the whole, have demonstrated they are prepared to exercise it responsibly. The sections in the bill which provide for bringing medical assistants, the broader the definition the better, under the jurisdiction of the medical profession, is sound public policy. I think it will pay dividends in the future.

MR. DIXON:

Mr. Speaker, just one or two remarks on the principle of this bill, in particular the great concern in Canada today about the costs of hospitalization. One only has to realize that in Ontario they are really concerned because the Ontario budget for medical and hospital care, for example, exceeds that of the defence budget for all of Canada, just in one province.

So we can see this bill is very very important because the medical profession is really made up of the people who set the standards for medical care throughout Canada, in particular here in Alberta. There is more responsibility on that particular profession than probably any other profession in Canada, because they are dealing with the personal lives of many many of our citizens.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that when the minister is summing up the debate he will touch on the reaction he received at the recent conference in eastern Canada as to the curtailment of foreign doctors entering Canada. How is this going to affect us here in Alberta? Is it going far enough that we will also restrict foreign students as far as our university is concerned, in the practice of medicine?

I am also pleased, Mr. Speaker, that one of the principles in the bill is to bring into the administration of the act, lay people in our province. We've had some very unnerving experiences here in Alberta in the last few months, with different investigations going on concerning some of our medical practitioners. I think we've got the public in Alberta a little bit concerned when, for example, they read statements that out of 70 operations, I believe, in one particular hospital, only 19 could really be classed as necessary. I can't think of anything worse than somebody being put through an unnecessary operation. I think that's one of the most dastardly things.

I think there is some onus on the profession and on the Department of Health to see that these things are cut down wherever possible. The public is becoming concerned and certainly uneasy when they read things like that, where people are giving that sort of evidence as sworn evidence, not just hearsay, but sworn evidence under a commissioner. I hope that regardless of whether we decide what we're going to call these paramedical people, nothing is interfered with that will prevent people, such as people who are trained as ambulance personnel - that they are able to operate under this act as the minister is hoping to do under the bill.

Mr. Speaker, there are one or two other things I would like to speak on, but I would like to get some reaction, Mr. Speaker, from the minister. This is a very very important bill. Some of the investigations that have been going on in our province are the type of investigations that we should try to prevent by seeing that they do not happen, so that we do not have to have commissions to investigate what is going on.

There's quite a temptation today - and I'm not saying this to be derogatory of the medical profession, it could go for any other profession - when all bills are being paid there is a temptation, probably, to over-treat. I think the onus is more and more on the department and the medical profession itself to see that this isn't going on within our province. I couldn't swear that it's going on to a great extent, but we must have some abuse. Any abuse shouldn't be allowed if we can prevent it at all.

That is all I have to say, Mr. Speaker, at this time. I'll have one or two other statements to make as we go through the bill clause by clause.

MR. SPEAKER:

May the hon. minister conclude the debate?

SOME HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

MR. CRAWFORD:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to deal in a brief way with the concerns expressed by three or four hon. members. In doing so I may sound like I'm doing it in a sort of point form. I hope for second reading that that may be a suitable way. We will have, of course, more discussion at the committee stage.

A very quick comment on the lack of a definition of "professional medical assistant". Mr. Speaker, if you'll pardon me I won't even get into the discussion on whether the word "professional" should be there or not. The definition though - if you look at the bill you see that medicine itself - of course doctor or medical doctor are not defined. "Registered practitioner" is, but medicine itself, apart from saying what it does not include, only says that it "... includes surgery and obstetrics ...".

It's presumed, Mr. Speaker, and was under the previous Act and has been for a good long time, that the practice of medicine is a very very wide-ranging and complex field which probably defies definition. I don't know where, outside an encyclopedia, one would begin to find a definition, and then once it was there it would be arguable. For that reason I think definitions like that are used very sparingly.

The "professional medical assistant" is - and the hon. Member for Edmonton Norwood made this point and made allowance for the fact that that might well appear to be the case - very very difficult to define too, because it's a field that's evolving. As soon as you have a definition you have circumscribed the area that that person is going to work in. You've circumscribed it by that definition, and in an area that is evolving the suggestion was that it would probably be better to work gradually in the direction of developing people with these special training qualifications.

Note that Section 26 does make reference to training programs at university or postsecondary institutions. By outlining the parameters of the courses and by allowing for the certificates that are granted at the end of the courses, a definition of this type of medical assistant is beginning to take shape. But to give it a concise definition at the outset would be a very difficult and probably not even a helpful matter, let alone a wise one.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton Kingsway made reference to the concerns that the nursing profession has in regard to whether or not, by bringing professional medical assistants under The Medical Profession Act, the doctors are occupying a field which is outside of medicine as such and there is therefore an intervention in an allied field or, as compared with the practice of medicine itself, a junior medical field. Their concern, I take it then, goes to the point that nurses may become interested in becoming medical assistants and will in due course fall under the jurisdiction of The Medical Profession Act.

That is, in short, an oversimplified expression of the concern. Their view is that, because the nursing profession has its own act, the similar area of operation which is becoming better known as [that of] the nurse practitioner, should be one that relates to the nursing profession and not a field that relates to the medical profession. I believe that fairly states their concerns and the issues.

At the time this legislation was being drafted we considered how we should approach the whole issue, whether or not there should be a separate act that had the result of leaving paramedical professional people under neither, or whether we should bring in another act. We decided against that. We looked at the prospects of bringing it in under The Medical Profession Act and The Medical Profession Act alone, and decided that was at least a beginning.

I had discussions with representatives of the nursing profession in which I indicated to them that the government would like to discuss with them, and would intend to proceed in the direction of, the amendments to the nursing profession act which would make the field of nurse practitioner relevant to nursing. We thought that was sufficient protection.

So if that function can be defined, and I think it can be defined as well as the professional medical assistant can, then the jurisdiction of that type of professional, semi-professional or at least expert, would stay in the nursing profession.

I'm not sure that is an entirely satisfactory way to do it, but it seemed to be the best sort of resolution when you consider the alternatives, having rejected the alternative of the separate act for what I thought was good reason. I recognize in offering this bill to the government caucus and to the Legislature that there may well be criticism, both here and outside the House, for not moving simultaneously, and not bringing the nursing profession act in at the same time.

I can say that it was a very simple matter of the fact that the discussions with the representatives with the College of Physicians and Surgeons left us in a position to proceed with their bill. Because of, I think, not quite sufficient examination of the other side of it, the possibility of similar amendments to the nursing profession act had not yet progressed to that stage. So it was not possible to bring forward the bill at the same time. It doesn't change the willingness of the government to continue to meet with the nursing profession and work on that particular problem. I'm certainly well acquainted with their views.

Just one other point, if I might, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Calgary Millican raised with regard to concerns about restrictions on foreign doctors. He raised a second point about whether or not, for one reason or another, some health care was below the standard it might be, using unnecessary operations as an example.

Dealing first with the restrictions on foreign doctors and the federal-provincial attitude toward that now, this touches on two points really: supply of physicians, which

in some parts of the country is really a problem of oversupply, and the question of qualifications. Those are the two reasons one would want to look at the question of immigrant physicians.

I think the new policy of the federal government in regard to immigration is a satisfactory solution to the problem. You remember about a year ago they were talking about a zero-point system for doctors so that foreign doctors would not really gain anything by coming to Canada, in the sense of being preferred over others. It was meant deliberately to discourage them. This was done primarily at the instigation of the governments of Ontario and British Columbia, which were very concerned about doctor-population ratios in their provinces.

Because that didn't seem to fully answer the concerns of areas of the country where physicians were not in oversupply, the new policy, as of earlier this month, recognizes that on the basis of special area needs and special requests by any area of any province in the country, the policy of immigration would actually assist the area in getting a doctor, because it would be directing him there.

In other words, the doctor would have to have a place to go. He couldn't just apply to come into Alberta, and having arrived cheerfully disappear into the hundreds and hundreds of practitioners who may in some cases be overservicing the cities. He would have to come for a special reason under the new policy and that special reason would be that he was needed in a particular place. I think that policy is an improvement.

In closing on the other point that the hon. Member for Calgary Millican just briefly sketched when he referred to a recent investigation, newspaper articles and so on, about unnecessary operations, I really think the place for surveillance of the competence and the ethics of any profession - and let's say specifically, in this case, the medical profession - is among the members of that profession. I don't think there is anyone else we have at our disposal who can make the judgments that could rectify the problems that concern the hon. member.

I don't think there is a bureaucracy we have at our command, another group of people we could summon up and say, could you please solve it for us. If we have that type of problem, which after all is based on either deficient ethics on the part of a doctor who may be working in a particular area, whether it be surgery or any other area, but the hon. member referred to unnecessary operations - either his ethics or his competence. Competence is something the profession has asked us for the authority to deal with in an increasingly stern way among its own members.

Now that is one of the reasons we were interested in saying to the medical profession, willing to recommend to the Legislature, that this trust be placed in them. We will be most interested in how they use it. They have always had most of that authority, but we were interested in reassessing who should have that authority. We couldn't find an answer which indicated that it really belonged anywhere other than in the profession itself. So I think the improvement of care is in those hands. We believe it's in the best hands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The motion was carried. Bill 4 was read a second time.]

Bill 9 The Co-Operative Marketing Associations Guarantee Amendment Act, 1975

MR. J. MILLER:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to move second reading of Bill No. 9 being The Co-operative Marketing Associations Guarantee Amendment Act, 1975.

The major aspect of this bill is that it increases the total amount of the liability of the province as a guarantor from \$5 million to \$20 million. These funds are used to enable co-operative associations to participate in the construction and operation of secondary processing plants for agricultural products, and in the financing of co-operative livestock enterprises.

Some of the present organizations having guarantees under this act are widespread throughout the province of Alberta and they include: the Alberta Grain Processing Co-op Ltd., the Alberta Honey Producers, the Bassano Growers, the Lamb Processors Co-op, the Northern Alberta Rapeseed Co-op, the Peace River Seed Cleaning Co-op, the Rainy Hills Grazing Co-op, the Round Up Ranch Co-op, the Stavely Livestock Co-op Ltd., the Stony Hill Grazing Co-op and the Western Floral Growers Co-op.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of organizations involved with our desire to increase the secondary processing of agricultural products within Alberta, it is essential that further guaranteed financing be made available. We appreciate the fact that the producers themselves are taking the initiative in setting up these enterprises. This is one of the steps being taken to provide jobs for people in the rural areas. These industries have served to diversify the agricultural industry with their many new products.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would say that this bill is important for the further development of rural Alberta.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise very briefly to endorse the principle of the bill. I certainly feel that it is a worthy one and no doubt will receive the support of all the hon. members. Clearly, when one considers developing agricultural processing, any move

which makes it possible for co-operatives to expand and to get into this field is one which is consistent with the pattern of development in the rural parts of western Canada, not just Alberta but the other prairie provinces too. The co-operative concept is something which is certainly very much part of our rural tradition.

My reason for rising though, is to take this opportunity to ask a question of the Minister of Agriculture as to where things stand now as far as the agricultural processing sub-agreement under DREE [is concerned] because clearly this is something which, while it wouldn't rule out the principle of Bill 9, it seems to me that the two would at least be complementary. I would ask the Minister of Agriculture if perhaps he could take this opportunity to advise us where we stand on that particular subject.

MR. BUCKWELL:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words and maybe pose a few questions to the mover of this bill.

The Province at this time is assuming, of course, four times the liability it had before. Are we looking at four times as many loans, or loans four times larger than have been made up to date? The member sponsoring the bill mentioned that the northern Alberta rapeseed people were part of these co-operative marketing associations. I imagine this is where the funds are going to come for the government guarantee for the Sexsmith rapeseed plant. The full number of production units sold and money borrowed would more than exceed the present amount. I think it's \$5.1 million.

This bill in a sense is in keeping with present-day trends over which the government has probably no control. Inflation is really the main reason, to some extent, why the guarantee has to be raised. I am concerned that if one such group as the northern Alberta rapeseed processors is to get \$5.1 million, or, say, could be guaranteed \$5 million, the lists the hon. member read of who could borrow from this, doesn't leave very much for the rest of them.

Maybe if it is in the form of a question it might better come during the clause-by-clause study - I would like to know how much of this \$5 million now guaranteed by the province is fully taken up.

DR. HORNER:

Mr. Speaker, if I could just briefly answer the question from the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview and inform him and the House that work is progressing on the Dree sub-agreement, and we're hoping for an early solution. Unfortunately I'm not able to be more specific but, as he may be aware, there's been a great deal of work on it and we're hopeful that we're very close to being able to sign that agreement.

I might, Mr. Speaker, just say to the hon. Member for Macleod, there are of course more loans and the individual loans are larger. That's the nature of the times we live in. On the other hand, I would say to him that not only northern Alberta rapeseed but also the lamb processing co-op are developments which, perhaps, are not large in the context of \$2 billion oil sands plants, but they are relatively large for the kind of thing that has been done with the co-operative associations guarantee in the past.

I think it's useful that we have a balance between a producer-controlled processing unit and those that might be controlled by private industry or by private company. We've learned a great deal in the past years on how these co-ops should operate. Indeed, some of them will require a substantial amount. We have at least one of the alfalfa plants as a co-operative and their financing will be done through this loan. That happens to be in the riding of the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview.

As I say, I think there has to be a balance. It's a useful check on private industry. If producers feel they can do it themselves and show us they have the management and marketing ability, I think they deserve the opportunity to try.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Question.

[The motion was carried. Bill 9 was read a second time.]

Bill 18 The Social Development Amendment Act, 1975

MR. MCCRAE:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move second reading of Bill No. 18, The Social Development Amendment Act, 1975.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very short bill. It is a clarification by way of three amendments to The Social Development Act.

The first amendment is to Section 11. By the substitution of the words "Subject to the regulations where" in lieu of the word "Where", it simply clarifies that the right and duty of the director in establishing an allowance to a welfare recipient is subject to the regulations which will be set by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The second amendment, Mr. Speaker, is to Section 25 and spells out that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will set maximum amounts of social assistance. That's the (a) portion of it. The (b) portion is that the Lieutenant Governor in Council has the authority to specify the amount which an applicant for welfare may own and still qualify for welfare.

The previous section, Mr. Speaker, did not define the areas in which the Lieutenant Governor in Council could pass regulations. It was very very general. The new amendment simply complements the earlier amendment, and that is to clarify that the director's duties are subject to the regulations.

The third amendment, Mr. Speaker, is one that should bring joy to the hearts of all mothers. It's to increase the family allowance rates in accordance with the recent agreement with the federal government which takes into consideration the escalation in the cost of living.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The motion was carried. Bill 18 was read a second time.]

MR. HYNDMAN:

Mr. Speaker, I move you do now leave the Chair and the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

MR. SPEAKER:

Having heard the motion by the hon. Government House Leader, do you all agree?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

* * * * *

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

[Mr. Diachuk in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN:

The Committee of the Whole Assembly will come to order.

Bill 9 The Co-operative Marketing Associations Guarantee Amendment Act, 1975

MR. RUSTE:

Just one matter on that one. This goes back to where the minister outlined some of the co-operatives that are borrowing money for certain projects. There is just one thing I would like him to comment on. We'll just take the rapeseed plants at this time in history. I think there are four of them now that are committed in whole or in part.

When you get into an area where there is a considerable investment by a farmer group in one of them and you say that for some reason or another there isn't enough business for the four or five of them, or whatever they might be, what position does that put them in? I am just expressing it as a possibility. I am not saying it will happen. It could happen in other things. Take your lamb processing, some private industry may start another one up in competition. This is a possibility and it may even be a slim one.

I think the minister is sort of smiling, but I just raise that because this goes into some pretty fair figures at the present time, and I just raise it as a point of concern.

DR. HORNER:

Mr. Chairman, I think it is part of the responsibility of the people who are approving these loans in our department, indeed the credit people in the Department of Agriculture and the back-up people on the production side, to be aware of the marketing situation in relation to ... [inaudible] ...

As I said earlier, in the rapeseed situation we have one co-operative and three companies. I think that gives us a balance in relation to who is there. I would certainly hate to see all four rapeseed-crushing plants owned by the same chain and I would do everything I could to prevent that from happening. Similarly, in the alfalfa industry, we have been monitoring that closely.

I think it is important that we not overstock in particular areas and that we have some idea of the marketing area. I think that's just part of the service we can give to these people when they make an application under The Co-operative Marketing Associations Guarantee Act, and similarly with any product.

I think we have to be able to back them up with marketing expertise or at least a type of experience that we can give them. I'm not for a moment saying we can guarantee them success because that depends on management and many other factors.

[The title and preamble were agreed to.]

MR. J. MILLER:

Mr. Chairman, I move that Bill No. 9 be reported.

[The motion was carried.]

Bill 18 The Social Development Amendment Act, 1975

MR. TAYLOR:

There's just one comment I'd like to make in connection with Section 25. Previously I made recommendations in this House to the hon. minister to vary the amount of welfare in order that a family could gradually get off welfare and back to work. It's always very annoying to people who are working if those on welfare are making as much or more than they are making by working, getting up every morning, et cetera. By the same token those who are legitimately on welfare have to have enough to get by on, to live a normal life, to look after their children, et cetera. It does pose a severe problem for the administrators in trying to be fair to both sides.

I do think, however, there has to be an incentive for people to get off welfare. Just as long as they can get as much or more by staying on welfare, not putting forth any effort, then there are some types of people who will do this. But if there is an incentive to get off and to gradually become self-supporting, then I think that is an excellent type of administration.

It appears to me that Section 25 is now going to permit the Lieutenant Governor in Council and the minister to do that type of thing. Where a person can get a job and gradually increase his earning capacity without losing his welfare entirely, I think it's in the interests of the public because it will eventually get him off welfare.

It's in the interests of those people themselves because they will become self-supporting. When it's done in one fell stroke, the person makes a little money and he is immediately cut off welfare, then he is unable to carry on and so he doesn't want to take that chance of being cut off welfare. But if that welfare part is gradually cut off as he increases his earnings, I think it is a different matter entirely.

I'm very glad to see this amendment come in. I think it's going to provide an instrument under which we can help those, who are unfortunately on welfare and who want to get off, to have an opportunity to do so and at the same time not reduce their standard of living below what they have on welfare. The amount of welfare, I think, will decrease because as a person's earnings go up the welfare will go down. But to cut it off entirely discourages people and they simply say, well I won't try to get off welfare.

I'm glad to see this amendment. I think it's going to have some excellent results. It's going to be a lot more work for the department and for the minister and there will probably be some failures but, generally speaking, it's going to be a very successful method of dealing with the welfare problem as we know it today.

MR. BUCKWELL:

Mr. Speaker I'd just like to ask the hon. minister, or whoever is sponsoring the bill, a question about Section 29. It says this amendment will increase the rate of family allowance payable, in accordance with the cost of living. Since I've been in the House this is the first time I have seen these rates in a bill. We complain that the government does everything by regulation but I wondered why the rates are set in the bill rather than say the rates will be set according to the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the ...

MR. CHAIRMAN:

Oh, excuse me. Did the minister want to reply to that?

MR. CRAWFORD:

[Inaudible] ... through, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN:

Very well. Mr. Notley.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Chairman, I would like the minister to explain to me the reasons for the change in Section 2 which changes the "Where" and substitutes thereafter the words "Subject to the regulations", and over in the other explanatory notes, as it presently reads, "Where the Director considers that a person is in need of assistance ...", et cetera.

It would seem to me, just looking at this very quickly, that we are reducing the latitude of the various regional directors. I know that in some of the dealings I have had in my part of the province with directors in both the north and south Peace, I've been extremely impressed with the competence of both people and their ability to size up the situation and make a judgment which I think was a wise one. I wonder if there is not some danger of reducing the flexibility of our present system by imposing regulations which would severely restrict the leeway of the directors.

MR. BENOIT:

I would like to ask the minister if the amounts that are being paid, here in Section 29, are all coming from the federal government, or whether the provincial government is adding to what the federal government is giving. If it is adding, how much is it adding?

MR. DIXON:

Mr. Chairman, one short question to the minister and I'm sure he can clarify it very quickly for me. I'm concerned about the children, that is the aid to dependent children. Would this be covered under this act? My question is: does the government plan to give assistance to these people? I have nothing but admiration for any relative who will come along when there is a tragedy and say, well, if the government will assist me I will look after the children. But their allowance is much less than for a foster child.

We have had some representation wondering if the government was going to increase this particular assistance. I don't know whether it would be covered under this bill but the minister, I'm sure, could answer if it is. If it isn't, are we going to increase it either by regulation or whatever else we wish to do it by?

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, I welcome the opportunity to clarify these two or three points.

Both the hon. Member for Macleod and the hon. Member for Highwood raised related questions in regard to Section 29. This, as I think the hon. member has by now noted, is the second occasion upon which these amounts were set by statute.

The reason is that it was in 1973 that the federal government took a new departure as a result of several federal-provincial conferences. For the first time since the family allowance program came into effect back during the war, they decided to allow the provinces to set the amounts that would be paid to different age groups. Some provinces had made representations asking that they be allowed to set the amounts based on the number of children in the family. If I'm not mistaken, the Province of Quebec had asked that it be allowed to be paid more for the last, or about the last, child in the family because they felt that very very large families required more support. So the more children you had the higher your payments should go. That was their philosophy.

In Alberta we gave much consideration to how we should do it. We had studies that showed a lot of evidence that teenage children, whether they be the first in the family or the eighth in the family, are the most expensive children in the sense of clothes and extra requirements that teenage children have and younger children don't. We decided that we would opt for a scale which provided purely on the basis of age rather than the number in the family.

A third alternative would have been not to do either, but simply to have accepted the figure provided by the federal government on a flat average across the province. Everybody would have gotten the same, which hon. members will recognize as being the traditional system used until 1973.

After the federal people brought in their legislation allowing the latitude to the different provinces, we acted on it and last year brought in the system that is described as being the previous section under explanatory notes.

The only reason for the change is that the federal government adopted the principle, as they did at the same time with old age assistance, that they would index annually, based on a cost of living escalator. From an average of \$21 per child across the province in 1974, they said they would go to an average of \$22.08 across the province in 1975. These new figures reflect those changes of a few cents in each division.

The other question on the same subject was, whether or not there is any provincial funding in this. The answer is no, there is not. It was traditionally solely a federal program and it still is.

Now, on the other point raised by the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview - oh, there was one more that may have related to family allowance - the question in regard to dependent children. I'll come back to that.

On the wording under Section 2, the changes to Section 11, the situation there is that "the Director" is the Director of Child Welfare, of course - no, pardon me, not in this case. This is the Director of Public Assistance. Is it a regional director? I think not. It's the director for the central office of the department. That's why the amendment is relatively easily explained.

The practice up until now has been that the act provided that the director had the legal responsibility for setting rates and the like. What he did in fact was bring them to the minister for concurrence. Speaking for myself, I would check them with the cabinet and then return them to the director as approved for implementation. He felt that he should be operating pursuant to regulation rather than under that informal system.

This is really a technical amendment as it was presented to me by officials, to satisfy the director's delicacy in regard to how much authority he was exercising. He said, if I'm pursuant to regulation, I'll feel happier about it. That's my memory of the explanation that was given to me on that. It is quite minor. It will still be handled the same way. He will still bring forward his recommendations. They will still go to cabinet but when they leave cabinet they will in the form of orders in council.

On the other point raised by the hon. Member for Calgary Millican, I think the dependent children that he is speaking of would typically be a case - and I think he made representations to my office on such a typical case the other day - where a relative took over when there was a great deal of difficulty in the family. You have the

situation where the uncle perhaps is looking after his nephew either because of difficulty in the home or some genuine misfortune of which there are unfortunately so many kinds.

The hon. member is asking, what kind of support does he get for that. He will, after applying for it, receive the family allowance for that child if the child is with him for any length of time, because the parents are not entitled to receive it if the child isn't there. The application can be made by the uncle. That's not a large sum.

The hon. member mentioned the difference between the rates he would get for that sort of support and the foster rates. That is indeed a difficult thing to contemplate. Where a person has made a decision to help, based purely on family ties, love and affection, there should be an established way to provide him with financial support.

I know the previous government didn't go that far in saying there should be this other type of thing sort of alongside the foster program and the welfare program, to look after that type of situation. We haven't gone that far either. I don't say there might not be a good case that could be put out for it, particularly when you start quoting a few difficult situations as examples. But that is the short answer to the question.

The government, as a matter of policy, simply hasn't seen that you can equate the helpful relative with a foster parent. That is the principle at issue there. Since we haven't done it, that is why the financial support isn't there.

MR. RUSTE:

Mr. Chairman, there is one matter here on which the minister may not have the information. I understand that in 1974, family allowance payments are taxable in the hands of the recipient. Is the minister aware of whether or not the federal government is going to send out these income slips showing the amounts paid to the families in the preceding year?

MR. CRAWFORD:

That's a darned interesting question, Mr. Chairman, and I don't know the answer. I know they are taxable and I guess they are also included in your own calculation of your deductions. That much I do know. But whether they get T's I don't know.

MR. RUSTE:

Just on that, I think the government requires anyone who makes a payment of over \$100 to send one. I wonder if the government is going to do it themselves.

MR. WYSE:

Just a follow-up to the question my colleague gave regarding foster parents and the allowance for children whose mothers are on social development. In the figures I have, for a 16 year old foster child the allowance is \$174, and for a 16 year old child whose mother is on social development, the allowance is \$52. So there is something like a \$122 difference. I fail to see why there is this vast difference.

MR. CRAWFORD:

I would like to comment on that, Mr. Chairman, because it really introduces the fact that we are talking about three different ways of looking after children, when we include the question of the hon. Member for Calgary Millican. I suppose there are four if you want to allow for people who look after them without any assistance. We can start with that, in other words, people looking after their own children.

You go to the question of the welfare allowance per child. Remember that what is happening is that you are making a contribution in a home setting where, in virtually all cases, there is one parent or two parents who are also receiving allowances for that family unit. They are receiving enough for the rent, they are receiving food and clothing - and the rent, by the way, fluctuates. We don't have a dollar amount for that. The amount allowed for rent is the amount actually incurred in the premises rented. That floats as the rent increases and people don't suffer from inflation in rents as a result. You have the food and clothing and other allowances for the father, the food and clothing and other allowances for the mother, then on to the child. Don't forget the child also has the family allowance paid into the home on top of the amount of welfare the province provides. When it is taken altogether, it is considered to be a reasonable amount.

I mentioned that because I think that it is one of the ways of saying, probably it shouldn't be compared exactly with the foster situation. The foster situation is one where the person has really entered into an agreement with the province which has the responsibility to look after a child who would otherwise be a public charge in some other way.

So they put them in a foster home instead of in an institution. Now, and this is partly determined - it's between the foster parent and the department as a what-the-market-will-bear type of thing. If you pay too little nobody will take foster children; if you pay too much, of course that isn't right either. We've tried to arrive at figures that are workable when you bear in mind those children are not in family units.

They are being, you might say, parachuted into the home of a relative stranger who is going to take on special obligations that he certainly wouldn't have if it was his own child. I thought the question left with us was, why should not the sort of scale that's paid for foster children, not welfare children now but foster children, possibly be applied to the relatively rare situations where a volunteer steps in. That was the case where the hon. Member for Calgary Millican raised one or two difficult cases.

I still think the answer is, they can be differentiated. I think they are easily differentiated. A foster child is really quite different from a person who steps in based on his love for his brother or his sister. He wants to help out with the young nephew or niece for a little while and so he is going to take him into his home. He can get the family allowance, but he is not in fact a foster parent. He is a volunteer. That is why there is no foster child type of schedule for those relatively few cases.

MR. WYSE:

I just want to say you fail to convince me on it. I think it still costs X number of dollars to raise either one of them whether the mother is on social development or whether it is a foster child.

MR. CRAWFORD:

Perhaps I might just say that foster payments now are at such a level that people who have - and some do have - two or three foster children in their home are given funds that the average taxpayer simply can't approach having at his disposal for looking after his own children. I think these things have to be taken into account.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to clarify something. I think the minister touched upon it but I'm not quite sure I followed it. In Section 25 as I understand it, (a) and (b) would give the minister the statutory authority to introduce the recommendations of the position paper on public assistance.

MR. CRAWFORD:

Yes, if I could just explain that this way: my understanding of the need for this legislation is that we would need to bring in the proposals of the position paper because all the other proposals can be done under existing legislation.

MR. NOTLEY:

So at this point then, while I believe there is a resolution on the Order Paper, there would not be any other formal discussion of the position paper in the form of legislation.

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, I think I would stress the position of the position paper if I can now, and that is that we are still awaiting feedback. We are certainly receiving some and I say again, as I said publicly when the paper was published, these are proposals. Now, we felt the reactions to those proposals were likely going to be good. Preliminary indications are that they are. This legislation would enable us to go ahead with two of these proposals. The other ones we don't need legislation for, but the ones involved here are basically the sliding scale of incentive which has been very very well received. The other is, changing the asset limitation, which I believe is long overdue. We've just had no bad reports on those two.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Chairman, just to follow that up, I certainly concur with the principles, both of the sliding scale of incentives and increasing the assets. I would ask the minister whether or not the second proposal in the summary of the public position paper - that is the choice between taking work and the reduction in assistance by 15 per cent - would also come under the statutory authority in this act.

MR. CRAWFORD:

The hon. member is quite right in picking that point up. To be accurate I should have indicated that I believe 25(a) covers that.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Chairman, I will just make this very brief comment. While I agree quite strongly with the sliding scale of incentives, I have some concern about the implications of the second proposal. It's quite all right for someone who is employable. But what is the situation where you have a family involved and for one reason or another the person who is employable is just the kind of irresponsible individual who won't try to find work? Are we in fact not going to be punishing the dependants?

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, in those cases the dependants are indeed often punished and very very much by the head of that house; by many things that he or she does or fails to do. I would point out that the section itself leaves us with flexibility. It doesn't have in it the 15 per cent figure, for example, that the position paper does, [it] provides that that could be set.

We realize that this is a new departure. In some senses it's an experiment. We wanted to be in a position to move in that direction and that is why this is here. But I think I can assure the hon. member that if we looked into the household of each and every one of the people this might be applied to, there is already enough suffering. So something like this, if it has any hope at all of motivating the head of that house in a way that other methods have not, would in the long run and even in the immediate term be a benefit to the other members of the family.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the minister's answer but I still have a number of unanswered concerns. I don't pretend to be an expert in the field of social development, but one of our problems in talking at least to the social workers in northern Alberta, is that they really have far too great a case load. It just isn't possible for them to provide the ongoing consultation with the clients that would be desirable were there sufficient staff people to really accommodate the need.

Therefore, it seems to me there is a danger, and I underline this, a danger that we might begin making bureaucratic decisions on this without having the personnel to follow it up. I can perhaps appreciate that this might be a feasible proposition if we had sufficient staff who were sensitive enough to deal with family situations one by one. But if we find ourselves in a situation where bureaucratic decisions are made 'bango' - people haven't got work for three months so they're given this arbitrary choice and the choice is made simply because there aren't enough social workers to look into the problems concerning the family. It seems to me you can create some real hardships.

There's another problem too. I hesitate to raise this but it has to be raised. That is the question that faces people of mixed ancestry. Now I just don't think it's a fair proposition to say to someone on a Metis colony who hasn't been able to obtain work for three months, look, we expect you to move to Edmonton. We expect you to move to Fort McMurray or we expect you to move to a totally new milieu or your welfare payments are going to be cut. It seems to me that the hardship that will create, particularly for people with a different social background to the one prevailing in society, would, in my judgment, be rather unfortunate.

Again, perhaps these are the things that could be accommodated if we had sufficient personnel in Health and Social Development at the regional level, so that your social workers were able to do the kind of work which I know they want to do.

I'm impressed, by and large, with both the quality of the regional directors and also the interest, willingness and commitment of the vast majority of social workers. But I happen to know too, as an MLA from northern Alberta, that they are just snowed under with work. That being the case, I would just advise the government to be very very careful with Section [25] because we might find that, in the name of trying to improve the system, what we do will seriously injure the opportunities of low-income families.

MR. CLARK:

Mr. Chairman, there are two questions I would like to ask the minister. First of all, dealing with this question of allowable assets, is the minister in a position to indicate the government's intentions? Do you plan to follow recommendations of the task force and, in fact, double the assets up to \$1,000 for a single person and \$2,000 for a family?

The other question deals with a very specific situation in my own constituency about which I was in contact with the minister. It deals with a situation where a young lad was finishing high school, was forced to leave home, and was staying with another family in the community. The family in the community was receiving some assistance from the department's regional office in Olds. The young fellow took a job after school unloading a transport late in the evening. It seems to me he earned about \$85 a month for this. That \$85 a month was taken off the assistance the department was paying the people looking after him.

So, in fact for working for \$85 a month, the young fellow was basically missing playing hockey and basketball, and the government was saving \$85 a month. It's not a very healthy kind of situation.

With the amendment we are passing here in committee, will there be the kind of flexibility which will allow that kind of situation to be straightened out?

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, I have been nodding at the hon. leader, but just for the record, [I will] indicate the government does propose to accept the task force's recommendations in regard to doubling the asset limitations. I am satisfied the sliding scale proposals, which are in very summary form in the position paper, are proposals which would achieve the sort of result the hon. leader has asked about in the second example.

MR. BENOIT:

In passing these regulations, may we assume that the rather thick book in the department which social workers use as a guideline will be either made thinner or eliminated? Or will that book, which we or those recipients of social assistance don't have access to, to know what is being used as a guide, continue on as usual?

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, I am sure it is possible to strike out the department's policy manual by act of the Legislature, but I haven't proposed that in this bill. I would like to say to the hon. member that policies of the department which are not incorporated regulations - I think that is what the hon. member is sort of referring to - are certainly changeable as a matter of policy and certainly have to comply with regulations. So, if a regulation is passed and the policy manual has in it another provision which is different, the policy manual would have to be changed.

I don't hold out many hopes for reducing the number of policy directives. So many cases come up which are so diverse. The one thing which I really think is an improvement in the last few years - and it began as a result of federal-provincial conferences in

the late '60s and was placed in the books by the hon. gentlemen opposite - was the citizen appeal committee route which people can take. There is no question that the policies cannot only be challenged but also changed. They can be changed in the specific instance of that person's appeal. I think that is very useful and I think people are using it to a reasonable extent.

MR. CLARK:

A question, Mr. Chairman, to the minister, what kind of a time line is the minister looking at in the implementation of both the change as far as the assets are concerned and the change earning incentives?

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, we had wanted to allow time for feedback. I've already indicated that we didn't think it would be so controversial that we would need to spend a lot of time getting feedback. So we've been talking about the middle of this year for the implementation of the bulk of the proposals. However, I would have to say that if we can change one like the asset limitation, which requires very little in the way of administrative change, prior to that time, I would certainly recommend to the cabinet that that be done.

MR. CLARK:

I'll just follow that up, Mr. Chairman, to the minister. Then we're looking at a situation where it wouldn't be a matter of implementing the whole package, I shouldn't say on a first-come, first-served basis, but on a piecemeal basis. That's what we're looking at.

MR. CRAWFORD:

Yes, for the reason that some are more easily implemented than others.

MR. CLARK:

One more question before we leave. My apologies. Without revealing what's in the budget, I assume that the additional money which was indicated would be necessary, in the release that went out from the task force, in addition to \$1 million - we can expect that money in the budget for the Department of Health and Social Development.

[Interjections]

The reason we raise that right now is that you will have the foresight so we won't have to have a special warrant.

MR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Chairman, maybe I can just answer in the affirmative and say that the way it appears, it won't be a separate appropriation. It will be merged with the amount that we've allowed for public assistance.

[The title and preamble were agreed to.]

MR. McCRAE:

Mr. Chairman, I move Bill 18 be reported.

[The motion was carried.]

DR. HORNER:

Mr. Chairman, I move the committee rise, report progress and beg leave to sit again.

MR. CHAIRMAN:

Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

[Mr. Diachuk left the Chair.]

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[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.]

MR. DIACHUK:

Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole Assembly has had under consideration the following bills, Bills 9 and 18, begs to report and asks leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER:

Having heard the report and the request for leave to sit again, do you all agree?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

DR. HORNER:

Mr. Speaker, I move the House do now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER:

Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Premier, do you all agree?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER:

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock.

[The House rose at 10:40 p.m.]

