

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Title: **Wednesday, July 30, 1986 2:30 p.m.**

[The House met at 2:30 p.m.]

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

MR. SPEAKER: Seated in the Speaker's gallery this day are two former Members of the Legislative Assembly. The first we would recognize is Robert Clark, otherwise known as Bob. He was first elected in the by-election of November 30, 1960, and served in this Assembly until 1982 and was Leader of the Official Opposition from 1973 until 1982. I wonder if Mr. Clark would please rise.

Also in the gallery is Jim McPherson, who represented Red Deer from 1982 until 1986. I wonder if the Assembly might also welcome him.

head: TABLING RETURNS AND REPORTS

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, on July 18 I promised to see if it would be possible to table a copy of an agreement regarding the Husky upgrader. I noticed from *Hansard* that at the time I misunderstood the question from the hon. Member from Westlock-Sturgeon as to whether or not I could table this document. I have the document and am now tabling it.

head: MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**Department of Agriculture**

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce today that the Alberta government will extend the farm fertilizer price protection plan for an additional year. The program, which was announced on April 1, 1985, was due to expire tomorrow. However, in keeping with this government's commitment to reduce input costs to our farmers, our government is extending the program for an additional year.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta farm fertilizer price protection plan helps farmers reduce production costs by paying a grant of \$50 per tonne of actual nitrogen and \$25 per tonne of actual phosphate in fertilizer grades purchased and used from August 1, 1984, to July 31, 1987.

Fertilizer can make up to 30 percent of the cash input costs of crop production. Dryland farmers seeding wheat in southeastern Alberta may spend \$15 an acre on fertilizer while north-central Alberta farmers growing barley and/or canola may spend \$25 an acre or more. With Canadian Wheat Board initial prices announced to be from 19 to 29 percent lower beginning the new crop year August 1, 1986, this program becomes even more important for our farmers.

So far, Mr. Speaker, my department has received over 44,000 applications under the farm fertilizer price protection

plan. This represents a total payment of just under \$30 million dollars or an average payment per farm family of roughly \$950. Announcing the continuation of the fertilizer price protection plan now gives Alberta farmers the advance assurance that their costs will be lower for an important component of next spring's crop inputs.

Combined with this government's commitment to lower the cost of farm fuels, farm chemicals, farm fertilizers, and the cost of credit, Alberta farmers have the lowest input costs of any in Canada.

MR. MARTIN: In standing in reply to the ministerial announcement, Mr. Speaker, whenever we're dealing with input costs and the very difficult situations in the farm community, we in the Official Opposition will obviously agree with the intent of it.

Just a couple of points, though, Mr. Speaker. As I say, we certainly agree with the extension of the fertilizer price protection plan, but will that \$50 a tonne be going to the farmers or the companies? I'm sure the minister is aware that there was some concern in the past that that money wasn't necessarily reaching the farm gate, that it was actually going to the fertilizer companies. Of course, that's not the purpose of this particular grant. I would suggest that it should perhaps go directly to the farmers as opposed to the companies so the farmers can then negotiate the best possible deal.

Failing that, I hope there is a monitoring system. We did raise that many times with the previous minister. There were different complaints across the province, so at least the monitoring system would be there to make sure it is going to the farm gates.

I applaud this, Mr. Speaker. The only other point I would make is that I suggest to the government that these are precisely the things that might be up for grabs in any free trade negotiations and agreements. So I draw that as a qualifier, Mr. Speaker. The things we're doing to help our farmers could be directly against any sort of free trade agreement.

Thank you.

head: ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**Extra Billing**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct the first question to the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care. In regard to many rumours floating around, we want to have the minister give us a chance to know where we're at. Can the minister advise whether or not he has reached an understanding with the Alberta Medical Association regarding an end to extra billing in Alberta?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated in the House earlier, the process of trying to work out an arrangement that will meet the terms of the Canada Health Act is one of my consulting firstly with the Alberta Medical Association; in part with other health care practitioners; with the federal minister of health, the Hon. Jake Epp; and then consulting with our cabinet and the government caucus before finally coming to some conclusion. Again, as I have indicated earlier, it's my hope that we will be in a position before this session concludes for me to be able to make an announcement in the Legislature with regard to those negotiations.

MR. MARTIN: To follow up, Mr. Speaker, is it the intention of the government and the minister to introduce legislation formalizing any understanding or agreement reached with the AMA regarding the end of extra billing, and would that be brought in in this session of the Legislature?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question. As I understand the terms of the Canada Health Act and in accordance with my discussions with the federal minister, several options present themselves with respect to an elimination of extra billing so that we can qualify for the federal payments, one of which would involve legislation of the nature that Ontario took. There's that route. The other options that exist are of course to come to some agreement with the medical practitioners, and then the federal minister would observe — I believe it's for a period of three months — whether or not the agreement is working. In other words, it is not my understanding that the federal Health Act specifically requires legislation. There are other means by which the result can be achieved.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, that may well be the case, but following from the minister's answer, if we do not have a formalized agreement which this Legislature ratifies, what would stop medical doctors from reverting to extra billing after this understanding is over?

MR. M. MOORE: The hon. leader's hypothetical situation is a matter for debate when and if we are able to make an announcement in the House and we table legislation. I'd be more than pleased to deal with it then.

MR. MARTIN: A supplementary question. It's a very important point, Mr. Speaker. Just to follow up and make sure that we're clear then, is the minister saying that he does not intend to ratify this agreement with the Alberta Medical Association in this legislative session?

MR. M. MOORE: No. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I might add that I agree it's an extremely important point. What I did say was that the whole question of whether we would have an agreement or legislation or a combination of the two is a matter I presently have under consideration. If and when I'm able to present something to the current sitting of the Legislature, we would then have an opportunity for the hon. Leader of the Opposition to debate it.

MR. TAYLOR: A supplemental to the minister also. Can he assure the House that he will not reach or sign an agreement with the medical profession that in any way jeopardizes the \$30 million or more we have coming? In other words, any agreement will not be signed unless we get the money back from the federal government?

MR. M. MOORE: At this stage, Mr. Speaker, it would be difficult for me to give any guarantees to the hon. Leader of the Liberal Party or anyone else. All I can do is repeat what I said earlier; that is, our objective in entering into discussions with the Alberta Medical Association is to ensure a continuation of a health care program in this province that I believe is second to none and at the same time meet the terms of the Canada Health Act, or at least convince the federal minister we've met those terms, which means we will be refunded the funds that are presently being withheld. So that's our objective, but for me to assure anyone that it will happen is premature.

MR. R. SPEAKER: A supplementary question to the minister with regard to the negotiation with the Alberta Medical Association. Is the minister currently negotiating a new fee schedule as well with the association in these discussions relative to extra billing? If so, as one of the items in negotiation would the item of open negotiations be a commitment towards the medical profession, which would be part of a trade-off in terms of extra billing?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure what the hon. member means by open negotiations. I have always been involved in open negotiations with whoever wants to negotiate. On a question of whether or not we're involved in discussing fee increases or decreases with regard to the Alberta health care insurance plan fee schedule, I can say, as I believe I've said in the House before — certainly I've said it outside — there are certain areas where medical practitioners have said to me they believe the fee schedule to be low in comparison to the amount of time and effort that goes into a certain procedure by a medical practitioner and in comparison with other provinces.

The most notable of those is the fee schedule that's provided for maternity, which is some \$340 for 10 visits, I believe, plus delivery of the baby and two visits afterwards. That comparable schedule in British Columbia and Ontario is about \$500. So I've said to the medical profession that I'm willing to look at any fee schedule changes that can be shown to be unfair or too low at the present time and see if we can't find some way to increase those.

The second thing, Mr. Speaker, is very important, and I'll conclude . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair really believes the answer has gone full term. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition, second main question.

Liquor Control Board

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my second question to the Solicitor General. The last thing anyone wants in this province is another labour dispute, particularly not one involving the ALCB, for most Albertans under a Conservative government. Could the minister assure the House that his department is doing everything possible to encourage negotiation so a strike can be avoided, recognizing that it's much harder to achieve a settlement after a strike has occurred?

MR. ROSTAD: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it's best not to have a strike situation, especially with ALCB. I think the public has been unjustly treated with the recent brewery strikes every summer. I can assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the ALCB is currently negotiating with the union involved, AUPE. It's encouraging to note that negotiations were only going to be conducted on Tuesday and today. That has now been extended to include Thursday, and hopefully the strike can be avoided.

MR. MARTIN: A supplementary question. I'd heard that also, and I agree with the minister that that is encouraging. Just to follow up, has the minister met with the Chair of ALCB this week in order to receive assurances that the board is showing maximum flexibility in negotiations?

MR. ROSTAD: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I've had meetings with the chairman of ALCB, and they are wholeheartedly con-

cerned with bringing this matter to settlement prior to a strike. We are very flexible.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. In view of the fact that negotiations are on Wednesday and Thursday with the possible strike deadline of Thursday evening, as I understand it, would the minister be prepared to meet directly with the president of the provincial employees' union to see if there is some room for movement on either side which might prevent a strike?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the Liquor Control Board is a Crown corporation which operates at arm's length. I don't think at this stage it would be appropriate for the minister to be directly involved in negotiations. They have their own mandate. As I mentioned, we're certainly flexible and hope that agreement can be made prior to the Thursday midnight deadline.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm well aware of that, but the point was they were trying to avoid a strike.

Let me move my last supplementary to the minister responsible for personnel. Mr. Speaker, the dispute seems to centre on job security rather than money issues at this particular time. My question to the minister: is there a government policy position on job security and position abolishment which could provide a guide for ALCB negotiators on government goals in that area?

DR. REID: Mr. Speaker, the approach of the government to downsizing in the public service has been well explained in this Legislature before. That approach would certainly apply to any downsizing in the Alberta Liquor Control Board. With regard to job security, this particular group does not function under the public service administration Act or the Labour Relations Act, and job security is of course a matter for negotiation between the parties.

MR. TAYLOR: A supplementary to the Solicitor General, Mr. Speaker. Is the Solicitor General in the position to assure us that if a strike does take place, the strikers will have a job to come back to after it is settled?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, there is not a strike at present.

MR. SPEAKER: The question is theoretical. There is no strike. Main question, Leader of the Liberal Party.

MR. TAYLOR: You're making it tough, Mr. Speaker.

Grain Prices

MR. TAYLOR: This is to the Minister of Agriculture. He has indicated in the House at least twice that his government endorses a position of placing a \$10 per bushel base price on domestic wheat. Contrary to the minister's statement yesterday, is he aware that Alberta bakers foresee at least a 15-cent rise in a loaf of bread when the two-price system of wheat is implemented?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the hon. member has indicated, our figures show there will be in the vicinity of a 5-cent increase on bread in the event the two-price wheat system is implemented. In the event they do implement it, and it's still under consideration by the federal government, I should also share with the hon.

member that we're hoping to have the federal government implement it on the basis so that it does not have an impact that could cause any fluctuations to the real market. We're hoping farmers will benefit by it, but we're also hoping they can impact it so that there will not be a detrimental impact as it relates to the consumers. We recognize there is going to be an additional cost. But we also recognize that during these times of difficulties for the agricultural sector, it is important to implement programs that will be beneficial to them.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, to the minister. If he can believe that wheat can be increased in price and not flour, he still believes in the Easter bunny and the tooth fairy. Has the minister determined the actual increase, if any, in cash income to the Alberta farmers under this two-price system considering, as he said yesterday, such a small amount was purchased domestically?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the hon. member that he turn up his hearing aid, because I indicated to him that the cost would be in the vicinity of 5 cents on a loaf of bread. I acknowledged there is going to be an additional cost. I answered his first supplementary in the House yesterday whereby I indicated that it will only affect approximately 10 percent of the wheat produced in Canada because that is about the figure used for human consumption.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, we're obviously not communicating. I think our gentleman up there is operating this thing. I asked him what effect that would be on the farmers, not the consumers. The first question was that we didn't agree on the 5-cent loaf, and I will give him names to call later on. But let's move on.

What protection will be given to Alberta millers and bakers to ensure they are not being underpriced by their American counterparts, who will then be able to purchase Alberta wheat and flour at up to a third to 40 percent less than what Alberta millers will be able to produce it at?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, just prior to getting into the meat of the hon. member's question, I couldn't help but notice that when the Liberals gathered for their policy conference and discussed agriculture, it was reported that the hon. member was absent. Had he been there he would have seen that his own party endorsed a good many of the proposals this government has put forward on a regular basis.

In specific answer to his question, I should share with him that this of course falls under federal jurisdiction. That is why we've made recommendations to our federal counterparts that they also give full consideration to taking into account the impact that it could possibly have for millers. They have a number of avenues they can explore to make sure that our grain producers are given a greater payment for their products. This is one avenue they are exploring, and hopefully they will come forward with something that is not also detrimental to our flour.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, a final supplementary to stop the blizzard. If I may underscore my last question to the minister, can he tell this Assembly how many jobs will be lost in Alberta's milling and baking industries when the two-price system comes in, which makes them uncompetitive with their American counterparts?

MR. SPEAKER: That's a hypothetical question. Any supplementaries on this issue? Main question, leader of the Representative Party, followed by the Member for Calgary Buffalo.

Energy Industry

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier, and it's with regard to the question of the PGRT and the response of the Premier yesterday saying he's losing his patience with regard to this matter, and I can certainly understand that. What I would like from the Premier in terms of that is: what is the strategy of the Alberta government at the present time in bringing about a quick resolution with regard to this matter? It seems that we're waiting for the Ottawa government to do something. Is there a strategy in place by the minister or by the Premier?

MR. GETTY: Yes and yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to either the Premier or the Energy minister. It's with regard to a possible informal meeting between the provincial and federal energy ministers tomorrow. To the Premier specifically, I am wondering if he has advised the minister to place at the top of the agenda of that meeting the question of the PGRT and its removal.

MR. GETTY: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the Premier. It is my understanding that the provincial royalty rate on new oil will change from 32.5 percent to 32 percent on August 1 this year. Could the Premier indicate at this point whether there has been a reconsideration of that with the possibility of a further reduction then, the 32 percent, on new oil?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Energy may wish to add to this. However, the reason I wanted to comment is that firstly, there are a variety of royalties on new oil. There is no royalty for a year on new oil, and then there is that category that was created some time ago that created something called new oil for royalty purposes. I just wanted to make it clear that there are two kinds. Secondly, we do not wish to be discussing the removal of the PGRT in any way in relation to the people of Alberta's ownership share of the resource they are selling; that is, their royalty. There is no comparison between the two, and we will resist any attempt to tie the two together in every case.

DR. WEBBER: Just to make a minor correction. The member raised the question that as of August 1, the marginal rates will come down from 33.5 percent to 32 percent for new oil and gas and from 43.5 to 42 percent for old. These are the marginal rates, and I think I should emphasize again that with these marginal rates, the average gross royalty combining old and new oil together is 26 percent. Then after deducting the royalty tax credit and royalty holidays and relief for enhanced oil recovery, the average net rate is approximately 15 percent.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to either the Premier or the minister. Industry sources advised me that by a reduction in this royalty rate we could stimulate

greater investment by the industry or maybe greater stability. My question is: has the government studied that matter? Are there formal reports with regard to that? Could either the minister or the Premier indicate the findings to confirm that position of the industry at the present time?

DR. WEBBER: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that many small companies do not pay any royalties at all. With the royalty tax credit at a maximum of \$3 million, many of the small companies don't pay any royalties whatsoever. So in terms of their investing in activity, it is not related to the fact that they are paying royalty rates. It's related to the cash flow situation for those companies. I think with the marginal rate reduction plan that was announced last year, to which August 1 is a further reduction, with an additional reduction scheduled for next year down to 40 percent and 30 percent for old or new, those things will help. However, the industry has indicated that we should review our royalty structure, and we will.

MR. TAYLOR: A supplementary to the Minister of Energy. Would he consider what the Saskatchewan government used a few years ago with great success to get the industry under way again creating jobs; that is, to declare a one-year holiday on new oil royalties?

DR. WEBBER: We have that in this province, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, just to follow up. Apparently, the minister has been quoted as suggesting a gasoline tax. Would he indicate if this is something he's brought up with his federal counterparts, and are they seriously considering this?

DR. WEBBER: Mr. Speaker, I am not advocating a gasoline tax. I think the hon. member has indicated there's a story out there that I've been indicating there should be a 5-cent a litre or whatever at the pump. I was responding to some questions about whether the federal government should be involved in assisting the energy industry, should low prices maintain over an extended period of time. I certainly think they should.

The question was asked, "Well then, where are they going to get their money?" There are a number of alternatives, and one possibility is a tax at the pump. That's only one alternative. Certainly we're not advocating that particularly. We will be talking to the federal government about a number of alternatives, but that certainly is one possibility.

Special Education Programs

MR. CHUMIR: A question to the hon. Minister of Education to make this a full day. In recent years we have become aware of the fact that many children of average or superior intelligence have learning disabilities which require specialized training. Rural areas in particular have problems dealing with the needs of these children. In early June eight residents of the Rocky View school district outside Calgary wrote to you expressing grave concerns about the unsatisfactory experience of their children, including problems receiving funding for remedial training at the Foothills Academy.

The question is: could you please advise, Madam Minister, what your department is doing by way of assessing the program in the Rocky View district in response to these

concerns and the serious consequences for the future of these children?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I will always have the programs for all students in this province, whether they are gifted, handicapped, or so-called normal students, under review. I will continue to do that, and with respect to the specific issue the member raises and a request for a response from me, I will look into the matter.

MR. CHUMIR: Does the minister have any plans for an overall review or changes to the programs for learning disabled children in rural areas in order that they can be assured a fair shake in life?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, one of the items which we will be dealing with today as part of my budget is the response centres. The response centres, although they will be headquartered in Edmonton and Calgary because that is where the greatest resources with respect to special education are located, really will be focussed on the needs of the rural community with particular emphasis on the special education needs in the rural community. I look forward to receiving the approval of this Legislature to proceed with those response centres.

MR. CHUMIR: Does the minister plan any changes in the current funding system of \$167 per resident pupil in light of complaints from the Calgary and Edmonton school boards that they educate a disproportionately high number of students?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's true that this budget contains a grant of \$166 for every single student in the school jurisdiction, be they special need students or not. In addition to the problems which Edmonton, Calgary, and other jurisdictions have raised with me — in that they are a magnet of sorts, because they offer an excellent program and therefore attract students into their program — there is in place a contingency fund, which can be used if those boards can show that they are in fact educating a greater number of these students than perhaps the norm would be.

MR. CHUMIR: Is the minister reconsidering the cut in funding for schools for the learning disabled, such as the Foothills Academy in Calgary, which cut is supposed to come into effect in September of this year?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I don't believe we're cutting support to schools in this province. Of course, that is a private school. The support for their program will continue. I think they're doing an excellent one. Whether we are backing off on that support, I don't fully agree with the hon. member.

MS LAING: To the Minister of Education. Is she considering additional grants to rural municipalities to help offset the tuition paid to the larger systems when they educate the special education students?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely why we have a resident pupil grant which funds every single student in the jurisdiction. If the jurisdiction feels they cannot meet the special education needs of a student within their jurisdiction and therefore sends that student to another one, the funding which the Department of Education has

provided to that jurisdiction can therefore follow the student. I think it's the best approach.

Private Nursing Homes

REV. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, a major report recently released by the U.S. Institute of Medicine called For Profit Enterprise in Health Care has roundly condemned private, for-profit systems of the management of health care. What specific program audit is the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care doing of Extendicare's \$400,000 private management of the Athabasca hospital to evaluate how quality of care is being affected at that hospital?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, the arrangement is between Extendicare and the board of the Athabasca hospital, and the hon. member could refer his questions to that board.

REV. ROBERTS: I thought it was mandated by the former hospitals minister and a very important question for this Assembly to debate. Can the minister assure the Assembly that no other contracts are being considered in the province for private management of the care of sick people until the effect of quality of care at the Athabasca hospital has been assessed?

MR. M. MOORE: First of all, my understanding of the arrangements in Athabasca are entirely different from what the hon. member purports them to be. We have a situation where the board of the Athabasca hospital is still very much in control of the operation. Instead of employing an administrator and a director of nursing and a variety of other senior staff such as most boards do, they have decided to employ a management firm. That operation will no doubt be monitored by the board and staff of my department.

In due course, I hope we will learn something from that style, but that should not be confused in the hon. member's mind with hospitals for-profit or private hospitals. It is nothing of the kind. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that I would view the arrangement that is going on in Athabasca, if it's successful in terms of cost control, to be something we would be very interested in extending to other hospitals in the province. I see absolutely nothing wrong with it in terms of the principle, particularly when the locally elected board is still in charge.

REV. ROBERTS: I'm not confused about the power that Extendicare has, as it is the major actor among private-run nursing homes whose return on investment is over 30 percent for nursing home care. What is the minister doing to encourage more involvement in nursing home care by community, nonprofit, religious, and service-oriented organizations which consistently have demonstrated better quality of care in nursing homes?

MR. SPEAKER: The last portion of question was opinion. The minister can reply to the question, please.

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, quite contrary to the hon. member's statements, the private nursing home operators in this province have been receiving very close to the same per diem assistance from the province for operating their nursing homes as have the board-operated nursing homes. The exception is some \$2 per day, which was considered in 1964 to be a reasonable amount to provide to the private operators per capita.

Again, contrary to what the hon. member might suggest should happen, we are now looking at and assessing the possibility of providing some capital assistance to private nursing home operators so that they might upgrade some of the nursing homes built many years ago and continue to provide a high level of service. Hon. members should know that for many years now we've been financing 100 percent of the capital development costs of board-operated nursing homes and pretty well nothing for privately operated nursing homes. Indeed, some of the ones that are operated by religious organizations have also been done without any assistance from the government. So by far the preferred position in terms of capital development money has gone to the board-operated nursing homes.

REV. ROBERTS: That does lead to my last question, Mr. Speaker, which is to ask the minister what guarantees he is building into his system to ensure that the extra moneys going to private nursing homes are going to quality of care, not excessive profits?

MR. M. MOORE: I should refer the hon. member to the Hyde report, as it's referred to, on nursing home care in Alberta, which was commissioned by my colleague some years ago. I also refer him to more than one announcement or ministerial statement by the former Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care regarding the extensive improvements that have been made over the course of the last three years with respect to nursing home care, particularly with regard to the number and quality of nursing hours, the provision of food and nursing care, and that kind of thing.

The only thing we have yet to particularly address with respect to private nursing homes is how we might assist them in providing some capital assistance that's at least equal to or partly equal to what we provide to the board-operated nursing home so they can upgrade their nursing homes. We're now in the process of doing that. Mr. Speaker, I'll just conclude that I'd be happy to provide the hon. member with all that information.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair is a touch concerned, especially in this series of questions, that the poser of the question seems to believe that this exercise is a dialogue which transpires while answers are being given. In actual fact, it really is a matter of posing the question and listening to what is a hopefully reasoned answer. Again, with respect to question period, perhaps we could revert to what it is really all about.

MR. TAYLOR: A supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, taking that since Athabasca has its own board, it is independent. Could the minister assure the House that he will have a group monitoring the study to pass back the knowledge and the information gained by the experiment in Athabasca?

MR. M. MOORE: Yes, it's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that we would intend to learn anything that can be learned from the particular approach the board is using to manage their hospital.

Child Care Standards

MS MJOLSNESS: To the Minister of Social Services. Although this government provides a significant amount of funding for day care, the issue of quality care for our children is a continuing problem. Is the minister doing any

formal review of value for public expenditure and child care standards for the province?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, I had mentioned in the House on another occasion on that very important matter that I had staff in from every region of the province to discuss day care. The staff has initiated a discussion amongst themselves and senior people in Edmonton. They have under review now a manual which will more directly reflect what we believe the standards ought to be on a more uniform basis across the province.

MS MJOLSNESS: A supplementary to the minister. Will she then undertake a review specifically addressing the need for better educational qualifications for child care staff as advocated by the Alberta Association of Social Workers and the Alberta Association for Young Children?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, it's fair to say that all matters are under consideration, but there is a very large diversification in views across the province. I've been hearing from many, many individual parents who have taken great exception to what they believe to be an enforcement of a manner in which children will be raised. The hon. member is quite right in raising it from the aspect of a number of the organizations who have responded and believe there ought to be specific qualifications with respect to day care workers. That too is under advisement.

MS MJOLSNESS: That's good to hear. What is the minister doing to improve public access to information on the results of licensing investigations in view of the fact that an unlicensed centre in Calgary was allowed to operate for a lengthy period of time?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understand the exact purport of the hon. member's question. Obviously, if somebody is operating some kind of a child care centre or taking children in that we were unaware of and not licensed, I'm not sure with that lack of knowledge on our part that we could make the public aware of such a situation. Hopefully, with all the discussion there has been about child care over the course of the last year or so, the public would be very much aware that in the case of institutional style of care or where there are very many children in care in a private home, those facilities indeed have to be licensed.

MS MJOLSNESS: A final supplementary to the minister. Has she done any review of the amounts of money which other provinces receive from the Canada Assistance Plan due to their deliberate encouragement of nonprofit centres and to the fact that Alberta loses millions of dollars each year under the same program due to our reliance on for-profit child care centres?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, we're very aware that the federal government has a different philosophy with respect to child care across the country, a philosophy, incidentally, not shared by the majority of the people in this province who have chosen private centres for care of their children and are very satisfied, from the information I receive, about those private centres. True, there are concerns raised about a number of centres, but in fact, they seem to be equally shared between the not-for-profit as well as the private centres. So I don't think there's any miracle to be worked just because we're talking about a not-for-

profit organization. I take great exception to the federal government literally blackmailing us by saying, "This is what you will do with respect to child care in the province of Alberta in order to receive your dollars back." I will certainly be undertaking major discussions with the federal minister.

Aids to Daily Living Program

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, I have in front of me the text of a letter sent to a 62-year-old woman in Calgary. I'd like to raise its contents with the Minister of Community and Occupational Health.

MR. SPEAKER: That's very difficult with respect to question period.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, it has to do with the aids to daily living program. There is a woman who requires the frequent use of oxygen. She's confined to a wheelchair. I would like to know why his department is removing this equipment and stopping the payment for oxygen for a woman in these circumstances who cannot pay for it herself?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I'd certainly welcome any information the hon. member would care to bring to my attention. He's probably had that document in his hands at least since earlier today. Rather than making quick political points here in this Assembly, if he was going to do the truly honourable, moral thing, he'd bring it to my attention immediately.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, I learned at 1 o'clock this afternoon that his department has changed the criteria for people receiving oxygen under aids to daily living support. It happened at the end of June 1986, so he's been aware of it for a while. How many people in this province have ...

MR. SPEAKER: Please, the question.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, how many people have lost the benefit of this program in Alberta in the last month since these criteria were changed?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I'll take the question as notice and get back to the hon. member, but I repeat: cheap political points on the backs of people ...

MR. SPEAKER: Sorry, the minister is out of order.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, of the people who have been cut off from this program in the last month, does the minister know how many are going to end up in hospitals because they can't afford oxygen, and how much that's going to cost the taxpayers of this province?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, no one in need in this province — those needs shall not go unmet.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: A final supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the minister if he would tell the Assembly how much money has been saved by this change in criteria in the department of community scrooges and occupational Simon Legrees?

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Member for Calgary Buffalo.

Access to Medical Files

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, a question to the hon. minister of hospitals. Mr. Minister, under the Mental Health Act and the Hospitals Act there is provision for access to medical files. Unfortunately, the hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton make it almost impossible for low-income people to get access to these files by virtue of charging exorbitant fees. Edmonton hospitals charge a \$35 access fee plus \$2 a page ...

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Would you care to sit down please, hon. member? Thank you. Perhaps the question could now be framed. We have had more than sufficient preamble.

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, I had understood one gets up to three short sentences.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think if you check the record, they're not short sentences.

MR. CHUMIR: I would appreciate if the minister would advise this House whether he is aware and supportive of fees of this magnitude which are being charged in both Edmonton and Calgary.

MR. M. MOORE: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure that the preamble is accurate in terms of a patient's access to records being identical in the case of records held under the Mental Health Act and records held by active treatment hospitals under the Hospitals Act. I would want to check that very carefully because I think there is some difference. In other words, one of the debates that's now going on with respect to the possible introduction of a new mental health Act does involve access to records by people who are involuntary patients in mental hospitals. That's a separate question I'd like to deal with.

On the question of whether or not patients have ready access to their records from active treatment hospitals, I would like to check into that. I've had one instance very recently where an individual wrote with respect to a hospital in Calgary and was concerned about obtaining a record, but I wasn't made aware in that letter that there was any particular charge. I'd be pleased to look into it. I could just say to the House that if the charge that's being levied by a hospital with respect to a person asking for their records is meant to prevent them from getting the record, then I believe it's wrong.

MR. CHUMIR: It is so meant. The issue is the same under the Mental Health Act and the Hospitals Act. It's the copying charge. If the minister finds that this is the case, will he consider legislation limiting the right of hospitals to charge such extortionate fees?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, without having looked into it, I wouldn't want to make that commitment. I can say I believe that if the charge is meant to prevent patients from getting a record that they're legitimately entitled to, I believe it is wrong. What I'm able to do about it, I don't know. I'll consider that.

MR. CHUMIR: At the same time, would the minister also consider whether he would be supportive of broader privacy legislation which advances the right of citizens generally to access files held with respect to them by government and controls the cost thereof?

MR. M. MOORE: That's an entirely new question, Mr. Speaker, that has much broader implications than I am able to respond to during question period.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired. Is this a point of order?

MR. ELZINGA: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In regard to a direction you gave us earlier to raise them immediately after question period, I should share with the House that there were some inaccuracies relating to the farm fertilizer protection plan conveyed to the House by the individual who responded on behalf of the New Democratic Party. He indicated this payment should be made directly to the farmers. In fact, that's the way it is administered, Mr. Speaker. We also in fact do monitor it, and it has been shown that it has been very effective in the farming population. Just so the record is clear — we wouldn't want any misunderstanding in the rural population — the rebate grant goes directly to the farmer.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. That was a point of information, rather than a point of order.

MR. MARTIN: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: All right, let us discover what this particular point of order is.

MR. MARTIN: On the same point of information, the point that we tried to make about the monitoring system is there was a great deal of complaint about the program last year. I was just suggesting that the monitoring system be tightened up so it is in fact ending up at the farm gate. We thought that was a helpful suggestion to make.

MR. SPEAKER: There is a point of order to be dealt with with respect to yesterday's session, but also so that all members of the Assembly might be clear as to the Chair's interjection with respect to the question as raised by the Member for Calgary Mountain View, a citation from *Beauchesne*:

362. Reading telegrams, letters or extracts from newspapers [In this case it was a letter] as an opening to an oral question is an abuse of the rules of the House.

That was the reason the Chair intervened at that particular stage. Then the member responded by rephrasing the question without reading extracts from the letter.

Speaker's Ruling

MR. SPEAKER: With respect to the point of order yesterday, during Oral Question Period a statement was made by the Leader of the Official Opposition with regard to a difference of opinion between himself and the Solicitor General. The Leader of the Opposition claims to have had information supporting his contention which perhaps the minister does not have in his possession. Perhaps both parties might consider private discussion on this matter outside the House.

Apparent differences of opinion are from time to time raised in the House, and in this regard I refer all members to page 114 of *Beauchesne*:

322. It has been formally ruled by Speakers that a statement by a Member respecting himself and particularly within his own knowledge must be accepted, but it is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by a member as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

I trust this is a rare occasion.

When the points of order were raised at the end of question period, an exchange took place with regard to *Beauchesne* and the use of parliamentary and unparliamentary language. *Beauchesne* fourth edition, 1978, does indeed list in citation 320, page 108, "not telling the truth" as being unparliamentary. However, citation 320, page 113, records that the word "untrue" is parliamentary. Such conflicting advice is not very helpful.

In the discussion of the points of order, the Chair cited *Beauchesne* 357:

A question oral or written must not:

- (q) contain or imply charges of a personal character . . .
- (t) impugn the accuracy of information conveyed to the House by a Minister.

The Leader of the Opposition twice stated that he was not impugning the motives of the minister. The Chair has decided that the Leader of the Opposition and the Solicitor General indeed have a difference of opinion with respect to the issue as raised. Further, the Chair believes the Leader of the Opposition has clarified his remark in that his comment was "not impugning the motives of the minister" and it therefore was not a personal attack upon the Solicitor General.

MR. TAYLOR: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. It's with regard to an earlier ruling today, but I gather I'm allowed to bring it up at the end of question period. It's about my question to the Minister of Agriculture being hypothetical. I don't see the ruling as being hypothetical when I asked the minister if he has studies to show how many jobs will be lost in Alberta if he goes — when the price of wheat system is in. [interjections] It's not "if." Surely, Mr. Speaker, it's a policy he's going to . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member has been kind enough to answer his own question and to prove that the Chair was indeed right in its ruling.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

head: COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Committee of Supply will come to order.

Department of Education

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would urge committee members to please keep down the volume of conversation. People at that end of the Assembly cannot hear the speaker or the Chairman. As long as the system is operating the way it

is, I would ask members to please keep their level of conversation down while the minister or member is speaking.

Would the minister like to make some opening comments?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do have some opening remarks. In the first instance, I would like to speak to some observations and priorities which I have in my new responsibilities as the Minister of Education. First of all, I would note with some pride that education carries a unique constitutional responsibility in our country, and the uniqueness is that it is a solely provincial jurisdiction. That is something I am ever mindful of as I approach my estimates and the duties of my department.

I would also like to speak to what is often referred to as partners in education. The first and most important part of that partnership and the hub of the wheel is the students. During my term as minister, I will always be an advocate for students. In fact, Mr. Chairman, as I undertook my duties as the Minister of Education, my first contact was with students. I was able to address the graduating classes of both the Grande Prairie high school and the Alberta School for the Deaf.

Other partners are certainly the trustees and the teachers, Mr. Chairman. I will certainly have more to say about both of those important groups later on. But I would say that their representative assemblies, the Alberta School Trustees' Association and the Alberta Teachers' Association, are very important partners to my job as Minister of Education, and I intend to work with them as best I can to develop the best system of education in the province and in Canada. Elaine Jones, president of the Alberta School Trustees' Association, and Nadine Thomas, president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, are two women whose commitment to education I respect and whose help I have very much appreciated as I've undertaken my new duties. In fact, I was able to meet with both of them in the first week of my ministry.

Parents are another important partner and in the last decade have been sharing a growing role in terms of the delivery of education in this province. I take my hat off to parents, Mr. Chairman, and in addressing the new School Act, it is my intention to enhance their role in the delivery of education. My own role as minister is a responsibility for the education of young people, and it is a legislated responsibility. I take it very, very seriously as I listen to all the partners and their concerns and those that we all share for a better system.

Mr. Chairman, I also take my hat off to my education caucus, of which I am a member, not the chairman. I am very proud of the people who are a part of that caucus in our government. I have a wealth of knowledge within that caucus, including representatives who have had experience in municipal governments and on school boards, as teachers, and just plain old people like me who have an interest in and a love for education.

I would also like to thank my department and my deputy minister, Reno Bosetti, who has been a real partner for me in this two-month process since I was made minister. I thank him and his important team for the help they have given me. To my office, a very vital part of a minister's role — I was part of one of those offices in the past; I remain a part of that office now — I have every confidence in their loyalty and their approach to the public. We work as a team. I invite all members of this Assembly to use what I believe are tremendous resources within my office.

Mr. Chairman, turning to the matter of the estimates before us today, I would note that 95.7 percent of the appropriated funds before us are directly transferred to school boards for the education of their students. In addition, 1.2 percent — bringing the total to 96.9 percent of my appropriated budget — goes towards the School for the Deaf and the response centres. Those are interesting, because they are the areas in which I as the minister have a direct responsibility for students. So I kind of like to think of both of those centres as my own students, for whom I am responsible. Finally, the remaining 3.1 percent is the appropriation which goes to the administration of the Department of Education. I am proud of those percentages, Mr. Chairman, and I wanted to raise them in the first instance.

Since 1971 there has been a 440 percent increase in education spending in this province. As well, I am proud to note that in 1971 the Department of Education had a total of 638 full-time positions. In 1986-87 we are at 740, a 16 percent increase, which I believe speaks well for the effective management of my department.

To turn now more to the boards' role in education, since 1981 there has been a 36 percent decrease in the total accumulated deficits carried by school boards in Alberta. There are 142 school boards in our province, with accumulated surpluses totalling about \$52 million, an increase of 25 percent over the 1981 figure. The net surplus of school boards, as a percent of operating expenditure, has risen since 1981 to its present 3 percent of total. We have briefly discussed the issue of deficits and surpluses of school boards in this Legislature, and I wanted to read some of those statistics into the record.

I'm pleased to present today the 1986-87 estimates for Alberta Education. These estimates, which bring government support for education to \$1.297 billion, reflect this government's continuing commitment to provide excellent education for our young people. At a time when, as the Provincial Treasurer pointed out, Alberta is facing uncertain revenues and a projected deficit, I am proud that this government has increased its funding to education by 5.2 percent over the 1985-86 estimates. I am also proud of the very significant initiatives which this government and my predecessors in this portfolio have undertaken in order to enhance our system.

Before I address some of those initiatives, I would like to say a word about the very important and key role that trustees play in our education system. Many of those trustees will be retiring, because they face an October election. To those who are, I give my thanks for their contribution to education. To those who are seeking re-election, I wish them every bit of good luck.

We've talked a good deal in this House about value for dollars. I was interested to hear both the Member for Edmonton Calder and my colleague the Member for Edmonton Meadowlark speak to always hearing about dollars spent on programs in Alberta but never having an assessment of the results. That is precisely why I am proud to be part of a new system which is focussed on the educational needs of the child. The management finance plan, as it is called, is policy driven and provides direction to school boards while at the same time providing flexibility and discretion to those locally elected boards in deciding how best to meet the needs of their students.

During my term as minister, I hope to see refinements made to the plan as necessary to ensure that it is effective and to ensure that the policies under which it operates continue to be directed toward the best interests of students.

I should add that as part of this overall plan, the budget estimates provide for maintenance of the direct services which my department provides to school boards and in many cases to parents.

One initiative which we discussed today in the question period is the development of the response centres, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary. The budget estimates for '86-87 will allow this exciting concept to begin to be realized. I look forward to seeing these centres up and running and providing a tremendous service to school jurisdictions, teachers, researchers, parents and, most importantly, students with learning problems. Related to this as well, in the fall of this year I expect that the first diagnostic tests will be made available to school jurisdictions. These tests have been under development for the past two years and will provide a tremendous tool for teachers to use in diagnosing reading problems in young people.

The second major area I would like to highlight is the implementation of the secondary education policy. As many of you know, that policy was developed on the basis of extensive consultation and discussion and the advice of many Albertans. I believe the policy is an important one for Alberta. It will ensure that Alberta's youth develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them to not only function well in today's society but shape the future as well. The implementation of this policy will take time. There will continue to be a need to consult, discuss and, most importantly, listen to the views of the various organizations involved in education as well as interested Albertans as we proceed through the implementation process. Mr. Chairman, I see that the private sector can have a major role in secondary education policy implementation.

Finally, I would like to mention briefly our plans for introducing a new school Act. As I have mentioned in the House, I plan to release a framework for the new Act prior to the introduction of the legislation itself. Following discussions of that framework, my goal is to introduce a new Act in the spring of '87. I feel strongly that our current School Act no longer is adequate to address the changing issues in education. A new school Act will place the focus of all our activities in education clearly on the student.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the number of new initiatives under way in education, I believe priority must be placed on consolidating those initiatives and ensuring that they are implemented and implemented well. The estimates before us today provide the necessary resources to move forward with confidence to continue the initiatives under way and to maintain the excellent quality that we as Albertans expect in our schools.

Turning then to the specifics of the estimates, as I mentioned, the 1986-87 estimates of \$1.297 billion reflect an increase of \$64 million or 5.2 percent over the corresponding '85-86 estimates. The school foundation program levy on commercial and industrial property adds another \$149.7 million, providing a total estimate of \$1.447 billion in expenditures in 1986-87. Of the \$1.44 billion, 95 percent, as I indicated, is paid directly to school authorities for the operation of schools. The 1.2 percent goes to the School for the Deaf and the Correspondence School, which provide direct services to students. The remaining is the Department of Education administration vote.

A general 4 percent increase in basic per pupil grants will enable school boards to maintain the high level of service now in place. Albertans enjoy the highest level of schooling in Canada, with 30.1 percent of the adult population over 15 years of age having a postsecondary degree

or diploma and only 12.7 percent having less than a grade 9 education. Both of these statistics, Mr. Chairman, lead the nation.

The \$500 million capital plan for school buildings has increased from \$99 million to \$167 million over the past five years. The \$167 million in the '86-87 estimates includes funding for new construction, modernization of existing facilities, the building quality restoration program, and electronic business equipment — computers — which concludes a three-year program totaling \$33 million for this purpose. I believe these capital expenditures together with appropriate courseware developments in curriculum will improve the quality of education generally, with a significant potential for increasing the breadth of learning opportunities to remote rural schools.

This budget continues to address the special needs of children. Special education block grants have been increased by 4 percent and together with contingency funds for special circumstances, of which we spoke today, total \$71 million, which compares with a \$52 million allocation five years ago. Grants for early childhood services programs, both privately and publicly funded, have been increased by \$3 million.

This budget contains approximately \$6 million to be used primarily for curriculum development associated with the secondary education report. The major initiatives for the next school year include planning for developing grade 7 as a transitional year; reviewing and revising the social studies, science, mathematics, language arts, health, and physical education programs; and developing and implementing courses in ethics, personal finance, life management, and integrated occupational programs. The beauty of our secondary curriculum focus in my view is that it does not prescribe a way of thinking; rather, it addresses the ability of a student to think critically and to make informed choices. I do not believe there is a more important role that we in the province in charge of education can make.

The budget also addresses the very important area of teacher standards. The Council on Alberta Teaching Standards will become fully operational with the addition of \$5 million. In addition, this budget includes \$5.7 million for the second year of the initiation to teaching project. In the first year this important experiment in the preparation of beginning teachers provided an opportunity for 878 interns in Alberta to work in a variety of situations, learning from excellent classroom teachers. This important project is funded co-operatively by Alberta Manpower, Alberta Education, and school boards and is a major employer within the educational community. The budget also contains \$4.1 million for teacher in-service programs. Taken together, these programs will improve the conditions of teaching and learning in this province.

I would like to say a few words about teachers in this province. I think we as Albertans are extremely fortunate to have such dedicated and talented teachers in our school system. Teachers are entrusted with a tremendous responsibility as the frontline players to impart knowledge and inspire continued learning in our young people. This is a noble and an onerous task which can have a profound impact on the future of those individual students in our society. So I take my hat off as well, Mr. Chairman, to the teachers of this province. I was pleased to note the Statistics Canada survey released, which shows that 95 percent of Alberta teachers have at least one degree, which is the largest proportion in the country, while the national average is 80 percent. Another part of the survey — before my friends

opposite decide that they want to highlight the fact that teachers' salaries in Alberta were a touch lower than the national average in 1983, I would point out that Alberta teachers on average earned \$35,000 annually but are younger and less experienced and therefore in the lower paying end of the teachers' grid for salary purposes. [interjection] It was important.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, this budget reflects the concern for fiscal equity between and among school boards. An additional \$2.1 million, or an increase of 7.8 percent, has been allocated to the general equity grant, which has increased from \$36 million in '82-83 to \$48 million in '86-87. Part of the additional funds have been allocated to jurisdictions experiencing severe sparsity in student populations and distance from major urban centres.

In summary, this budget maintains and improves the already high level of service to Alberta students through a general 4 percent increase in per-pupil and transportation grants as well as the continued commitment to the five-year school capital plan now in place. As well, the special needs of children continue to receive the highest priority.

I spoke of students at the outset of my remarks, Mr. Chairman, and I must say that during preparation for these estimates today, I recalled my student days when I stayed up into the wee small hours studying. I've been doing a lot of that in preparing for this, my oral exam. Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud of this government's record in education. The estimates which I have presented today will allow us to continue to work toward our goal of providing Alberta students with the very best educational opportunities possible. I am committed to that program with everything that I have, and I look forward to the comments and questions that will follow.

MS LAING: Mr. Chairman, now begins the oral exam, and being experienced in oral exams, I wish you well. I'd like to congratulate the minister on her appointment as Minister of Education. I truly welcome her openness and her willingness to investigate and discuss matters pertaining to education with people involved, and I look forward to the coming years. I believe that she and I share a commitment to education and to the well-being of children in Alberta.

I'm not a teacher, but I have had an arm's-length relationship with education for a long time, having had four children move through the educational system in Edmonton and having taught for about 10 years in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. I have observed some of the impacts of the educational system on both children and teachers. I would like to address the estimates from that perspective.

Our children, as has been said, are our most valuable resource, and our future and the future of our society rests with them; indeed, the future of the world rests with our children. Our education system is charged with preparing our children to find their places in society and in the world and to help them create and recreate our society in their future. In doing this, the educational process should be committed to drawing forth or leading children to the expression of their own unique potential. Our educational system embodies the philosophy and values of our society and our culture, and our commitment to the educational system and education reflects our commitment to our children and to their future.

I want to now address some of the concerns that I have about this budget. I'm concerned about the commitment to funding municipalities and school boards. The New Dem-

ocratic Party as well as the members for Stettler and Ponoka-Rimbey have proposed that Alberta Education pick up 85 percent of the funding required for education. We have not seen that at the present time.

I have a concern also about the emphasis on education in the Speech from the Throne but note that education in the 1986-87 budget gets only 12.2 percent of the budget and in 1984-85 received 12.7 percent. So there is some decrease in that budget, and there has been a continuing decrease in the amount or proportion of the budget that has gone toward education in the years since 1970.

The other thing I note is the decrease in the proportion of funding to school boards to pick up their school costs. This has increased from school boards having to pay 15 percent of school education costs in 1971 to 37 percent in 1985, so the local taxpayers' cost of education has increased from \$43 million to \$585 million in those years. Although I see an increase in funding, I'm wondering how the minister can explain this increasing burden on local taxpayers.

I note again that overall we have increased education funding over the years, keeping up with the cost of living, but I note great discrepancy in the amount of increases in individual years. In 1981-82 there was a 12.7 percent increase, the following year a 14.1 percent increase, two years later no increase at all, last year a 2 percent increase, and this year a 4 percent increase. I find these kinds of fluctuations troubling and would ask that the minister assure us that in the future this kind of fluctuation will not occur.

The increasing load on local taxpayers poses a particular burden for rural municipalities who have a small tax base, particularly in a time of agricultural crisis. My concern then is that there will be some results in these kinds — we have already seen some results from this kind of increased burden, one of them being school closures resulting in children having to spend extended periods of time on buses. Then there is an increase in transportation costs.

Other things we've seen are an increase in the number of split or multi-grade classrooms, reported to be up in 6.2 percent of schools; increased student/teacher ratios; and reductions in support staff that relate to the special needs of children: aides, counselling, library staff, those kinds of things. In some cases, there is deterioration of buildings and facilities, although we've heard a commitment to an upgrading of those. I would ask that the minister then investigate these matters and determine what steps will be taken to offset this increasing burden.

In terms of the increased demand, even though the funding has kept up with the cost of living, one of the concerns I have is that there have been increased demands on schools; that is, schools are having to meet more and more needs in terms of services provided to children that fall outside the normal range of abilities. We see that in a move toward mainstreaming. This often requires additional educational personnel like teacher's aides and sometimes equipment like hearing aids, ramps, and those kinds of things.

We also see an increasing push to prepare children for advancing technological society, and that means more equipment like computers. We also see an increased demand for a diversified curriculum. Although there have been increases in funding, I do not think they would absorb the cost of these special needs. The 5.2 percent cannot absorb these costs and they may, in fact, result in a greater teacher/student ratio. My concern in the face of this is that school boards will be faced with one of two choices: reduction in the quality of education or increase in property taxes.

In addition, schools have turned to implementing user fees, and again we somehow see this as unfair taxing for some people. We see students being charged for everything from student union fees to locker fees to busing fees — one school jurisdiction charges \$180 a year for school busing fees — course fees as much as \$50 to \$100 for phys ed 30 and rental fees for books and equipment. I would suggest this imposes real hardship on some families, families that have low incomes or families like mine, which had four children going to school at once. September was a kind of rough time. My concern is that this creates a two-tier system in terms of some parents simply being unable to afford to have their children pay the rental on band or phys ed equipment or go on field trips. I would ask that the minister in fact commit herself to the elimination of user fees so that all children can participate fully in the education process.

I would also like to see her commit herself to increased funding to the beleaguered municipalities that are having real difficulties at this time with school enrollments, as there is increasing demand on their resources.

I would just like to look at a couple of issues in vote 2 now. In vote 2, I noticed that although funding to public schools has increased approximately 5.2 percent, the funding increase to private schools is 8.2 percent. I wonder if the minister would elaborate on the reasons for this more substantial increase in funding to private schools. Does this mean there will be more private schools funded or that the private schools that exist will get a greater proportion of funding? I would also ask what methods are going to be used to monitor these schools and hold them accountable for the public funds they are using.

Another area that I'd like to address is community schools. I have two really lovely community schools in my constituency, one being Holy Trinity high school, and I find these schools are the focal point of the community. People meet there; they come there during the day and in the evenings. They're much used. I think it helps create a community spirit and makes the schools usable throughout the day and evening. In addition, the councils involved in these schools have told me they try to breathe life into education and work very hard in many ways to enhance their curriculum.

The first interdepartmental committee chartered schools in 1980; that was when the first schools were chartered. Five years ago, in 1983, there was a freeze on the resources to these schools, so there has been no new funding made available to new schools. In addition, there has been no increased funding to the existing schools to meet the cost-of-living increases. I've heard much concern raised about these schools, which have received very positive ratings from teachers and communities alike in their evaluations. The concern is that the present commitment is to September 1987 for the schools that are in existence and that are going through an evaluation process. There are also some schools awaiting funding after they have been chartered. I would ask the minister what her commitment is to the already chartered schools as well as to the funding of new schools. I would hope that the community schools, which I see as a very valuable resource in the community, would be seen as an alternative that can support the plurality in our culture within the publicly-funded school systems.

I also have a concern that was raised in question period today in regard to special education funding to municipalities that have to send children to special schools for their special needs. I have heard that the per capita grant does not meet the financial needs of those communities if they have very

many children that have special needs. I'm also concerned and have heard many concerns raised about the whole issue of residency, whether that is geographical residency or residency in terms of the religion one belongs to, and how that funding split is going to be resolved. I know that's a difficult issue and would ask the minister for her thoughts on the matter.

I would now like to look at vote 3 and curriculum development and student evaluation. We have heard that the new curriculum will be coming into effect, and I'm very grateful that the minister is going to listen and evaluate, because I have some real concerns about that curriculum. I have real concerns about the use of grade 7 as a transition year. In my experience as an educator and also in terms of my work with parents, I have discovered that many children are underachievers in terms of their intellectual capacity. It may be that they are learning-disabled and what they need is time to mature.

Boys, who are 90 percent of our learning-disabled population, fall into this category particularly. They get good care and good resources until the end of grade 6, and then they enter junior high school. What they need is a couple more years to mature, because my experience is that many boys in fact do not come into their own until they reach high school or even university. I've seen boys that became men who just managed to get through high school, then really blossomed in university. My concern is that if we start to stream at the young age of 12 or 13, although I know the proposal is that this be very flexible, my experience is that if you're in an academic program and can't quite make it, you can move back into the vocational-oriented program easily. But the movement the other way is not easy; it is in fact almost impossible unless the child moves back into, in this case, a grade 7 curriculum. That's very hard for a 15-year-old child to do, so I have some concerns about that. I have concerns about things happening to junior high children right now and have a desk full of letters from parents that say, "My child did well until grade 7, and then things just fell apart."

Another area that I would like to address is the whole area of evaluation. I see that \$7 million has been designated for evaluation. I got some shocks when I came to the Legislature. The first one was when I was over in the annex on July 2 and there were a whole bunch of teachers going up to the 7th floor to mark diploma examinations. Having taught at university and marked papers that were not very well written, I thought it was maybe not a bad idea, although I'm not sure diploma examinations really evaluate children's abilities, because an examination is in fact one piece of behaviour and many, many factors come into play when a child writes an exam. So maybe that was not too bad an idea, but then I discovered that going into the basement were teachers marking achievement exams for grades 3, 6, and 9. I was thunderstruck that grade 3 children, eight years of age, were having to go through achievement exams. I understand that the exams were not being used to label children but were in fact being used to evaluate teacher effectiveness.

I have some real concerns about that. We know that within one class, there may be great variation in the children and they may average out, but we know that sometimes we have a class of children who all have some real deficits. That is not the teacher's fault, and these kinds of examinations cannot pick up on that. So I have concerns about teachers having this kind of pressure to have their children do well on achievement examinations.

I personally think education is a process in which we help children come to value and love learning. Let me tell you, if we have teachers who are pressured to have their children do well in achievement exams, they are not going to be doing that. They're going to be teaching the children how to pass the examination and do well and reflect on them. In addition, when I heard achievement exams, I thought maybe arithmetic, maybe spelling, but when I heard science and social studies, again, it seems to fly in the face of what we know about how children learn and develop. Those first years of learning are really exploring, and until children reach the age of 14 or 15, they do not start to integrate things intellectually. So I really have some very great concerns about this focus on achievement, the measurement of achievement, and the kind of work teachers have to do to keep track of what's happening in their classroom. Certainly I've talked with teachers who feel overwhelmed and inundated by the paperwork they do.

Another concern I have is about the goals of the curriculum. Again, we have this movement back to the basics, and it's the pendulum swing. It seems that when things go bad in society, we decide to go back to the basics in education to make up for it somehow. I think what we're looking at when we have this kind of back to the basics is measurable knowledge. We're looking at the kind of knowledge we can measure. We cannot measure in examinations the ability to question, to explore, to think critically, and to create new ideas. Those kinds of things come in a much more relaxed situation than one where the teacher and the children are always worrying about examinations.

I think we have two things going on here. When we teach for examinations, we're not really teaching what we want our children to learn. We want to teach them to think and to feel. We need them to know some things, but we need to focus on not only content but process. I have a fear that with the new curriculum, particularly in social studies, we're going to move back to facts more than thinking about and evaluating. So I have those real concerns.

When we think about how we educate our children, we need to recognize that children learn in different ways. The first seven years of life they tend to learn by doing physical things, rediscovering the world in some ways. For the next seven years of life they tend to learn through their emotions, through song, dance, art, myth, and those kinds of things. When they reach 14 or 15, when abstract thought starts to develop, they are able to integrate that. For children that learn best in that way, you cannot measure the things they are learning in achievement exams before they hit the age of about grade 9 in fact. If we force children into achieving in a way in which they're not yet psychologically ready, I think we really take away from their potential.

Another area that I have concern about is the focus on technology and knowledge at a time when we see children facing incredible personal stress. As we spoke of the other day in the House, we see a very high incidence of childhood depression and adolescent suicide in children. We see great numbers of family disruptions, family dislocation, and children really questioning what their future is. I think our education, our curriculum, has to address those needs. We have to talk about human understanding and human inter-relatedness, and in my mind those are as important as learning facts. I think we have to look at that.

The other thing I'm concerned about is the focus on achievement and excellence. What are the standards? How do we determine the standards? About two-thirds of children fall within the normal range. Where do we set the standard?

If the standard is too high, then some children are going to be constantly under anxiety and pressure to achieve at some level beyond their potential. If we set the standard for the average child, then the child that is bright and creative will in some sense be levelled or brought down to that. When we have this focus on examinations, I think what we're doing is levelling children and not allowing for their unique development. We're not allowing them to be individuals; we're trying to make them all the same. So I have some real concerns about that.

The last thing I wish to address is the Teaching Profession Act and the teacher's evaluation. This was something else I was kind of surprised about when I came here. I'm a psychologist. I belong to a professional organization, and by golly, if I do something wrong, if I'm incompetent or unethical, my professional organization gets busy and dumps me right out on the street. What I noticed was that teachers, although they are a profession, are not treated like professional people.

What I would like to refer to in closing is a quote from the Minister of Labour on July 10 in this House. I will just read this:

There is the necessity that the groups themselves have some control over educational standards, requirements for registration or [licensing], the peer review process, and self-regulation. These things are much better done by the professions themselves than by excessive legislation and regulation.

I would ask that the minister take the words of the hon. Minister of Labour under advisement in regard to how we treat our teachers, who I believe indeed deserve the recognition of a professional.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I would like to respond to some of the points that my friend from Edmonton Avonmore has raised; I don't think I'll be able to cover them all.

In terms of her opening remarks, nor am I a teacher, but I am a parent. Although my child is not yet into the public school system, believe me, I am keeping a pretty close eye on it to ensure that his education is a good one.

First of all, I would like to address the issue of the 85/15; in other words, the province provides 85 percent of the cost of schooling in the province and the municipalities are guaranteed a 15 percent role in that total cost. The member has described this as the solution to a property tax decrease in this province. I don't agree with that point of view, and I will give you my reasons for that.

In 1974-75 in this province we put a commercial/industrial levy for the school foundation program on all properties. In those two years we pulled off from that levy first residences and then farms. The result was that municipalities moved in virtually instantly to take up the tax room vacated by the school boards. I would argue that as a solution to property tax increases, the cost to the local taxpayer decreasing as a result of the province moving to 85 percent funding would not in fact be the result.

I would also note that school boards in this province have discretionary authority to raise money. They basically go to the municipality and say, "This is how much we want." The municipality translates that into a mill rate, and that is what is applied. In fact, I can say that the local education tax in Alberta is among the lowest of all provinces that allow local taxation for education purposes.

Although we're going to get into this debate in this Legislature, and I look forward to it, I would also like to say a few things in terms of the implications of an 85/15

split in terms of provincial funding. To do this instantly, Mr. Chairman, would require an additional \$325 million from provincial revenues at a time when they just aren't there. Provincial controls on school board spending would be required; otherwise, the provincial budget would be opened. I for one am not willing to relinquish my responsibilities as a trustee for the people of Alberta to another locally-elected jurisdiction. Some form of provincial control on municipal spending would also be required in order to protect the taxpayer about whom we are concerned, and I'm not sure municipalities in this province would be too keen on the province moving in that way. I could go on, Mr. Chairman, but I think those are important points to make.

With respect to the member's view that because the education portion of total expenditures in the province has fallen, support for education has therefore fallen, that is not the case. As the member will note, the size of the provincial budget over that same period was greatly increased and in fact has been constantly increased for education in this province.

School closures: I share the concern of the hon. member. It's probably been one of the least happy jobs I have had to do since I was made minister. I do believe there's a very important role for the local school board with respect to school closures, and that is certainly what I test as I review those and have the final approval. Those school boards must meet their own policy, which is in keeping with provincial guidelines, with respect to closure. If they have not met that policy and essentially had an important public review within their local system, then I will not approve that closure. As I've said, I do believe that local boards are the best and the closest group to review those closures.

The member also tied the school closure to an increase in busing, bigger buses, and longer bus routes. I can say that included in the budget which I'm presenting here today is an incentive to boards to have smaller school buses. Effectively, what that is doing is having shorter routes to schools. There may be some duplication, because the buses are going out from one point and gathering around the same area, but rather than having to fill up a 60-member bus, they are perhaps filling up a 30, 40, or less member bus. I believe it is an important point to make in this context.

Mainstreaming: I believe that mainstreaming is not a panacea for students in the education system. I believe some students — and I was pleased that the Minister of Social Services, when she was addressing the important issue of the Michener Centre, acknowledged that in fact some students need institutional care. I think of my address to the graduating students of the Alberta School for the Deaf. What is finally working there now is that students who are studying in the public school system are doing so for half a day at a time in order that they may return to the School for the Deaf and just gain the confidence that that facility provides them, to give them the strength to go out the next day and learn in a way that other students don't have to learn. So with respect to mainstreaming, I share the member's concern about it. It isn't a panacea, but it is something that I think is working well in places like the Crystal Park school up in Grande Prairie, where students with mental and physical handicaps are working together with students who fortunately don't have those kinds of handicaps. As an experiment, it is working well.

The 8.2 percent increase in private school funding is based on a predicted increase in enrollments at a time about

12 to 14 months ahead of the fact. I would note as well that over half of that is due to the increase of the 4 percent adjustment that's built into there, so there may be some flexibility in that figure.

I agree that the community schools are a tremendous thing. I've had lots and lots of parents and teachers within those community schools tell me how proud they are of the program they have. I think one of the things we have observed is the role of councils in those schools. As I indicated in my opening remarks about the School Act, the role of parents is one that we have seen developed very effectively in the community school program, and I think it's a very important focus. As the member noted, no new community schools have been approved this year. However, there is an evaluation going on. I expect to be able to review the results of that evaluation once the Legislature is out. I note the member's and certainly other Assembly members' interest in community schools.

Special education doesn't meet the needs of students. Special education is obviously one of those areas where, if we had the money, we would put every cent we had to assist those students that have more difficulty in learning than others. That isn't the case. Since we have moved to block funding on special education, I believe one of the most positive results of that is that the resident student, in other words the student for whom a particular board is responsible by law, is funded under that program. It means that students cannot be shipped out because they have handicaps, and that's why I believe the residence concept is the best one for special education funding. I suppose we can constantly debate whether there is enough. In fact, we have moved from about \$130 per pupil to \$166 this year and have grandfathered in over the past two years the programs which boards were doing for special education to the point where no board is receiving less. In fact, most are receiving substantially more for special education. It has resulted in rural areas now addressing the needs of special education, and the link-in with the response centres that I raised today in question period is one that I think we should explore, and I hope we can.

Curriculum concerns about grade 7 as a transitional year: one of the good things about that is that there will be a very concentrated assessment of reading skills of young people once they hit grade 7, and that's really important. I was a disabled student in that sense. I had a reading problem which was picked up when I was in grade 8, and I really believe that that's a very important part of that transitional year. Yes, it's going to mean those kids are examined, and they may well be tested. I think there is a responsibility on the part of the school system to ensure that the best possible thing is being done for whatever that child is facing. I believe it does address uniqueness in kids.

Rural education: I think that was the last one I noted. I share with the hon. member her concerns about rural education. I think there are more things we can do in the province to address what I believe is probably an economic and cultural as well as educational phenomenon. I don't believe it's restricted to education. I think we can do some things with respect to technology to help our rural schools have access to the opportunities, through video presentations or whatever of a good teacher, for example. I think that can equalize the opportunity in a certain way, which is certainly always going to be my goal.

I think that covers it, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

MR. NELSON: First of all, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to congratulate the minister on her portfolio. During the first

number of weeks that we've been here and she's had her portfolio, she's certainly demonstrated that she's very capable of handling the portfolio of education.

I guess what I would like to lead off with is somewhat of a question. When I hear comments over the years and in the Legislature about how government should be doing things or not doing things with education or other things, I'd just like to ask where the family or the parents fit into the whole aspect of education and maybe even the socialist program. The government is not an end-all to all things.

Mr. Chairman, there are some comments I'd like to make relevant to the actual estimates and the program itself, and then I'd like to develop those as I go along. I have a number of concerns relevant to the financial aspect of the development of the programs here. In the first instance, on the overall of the total department, I'm concerned about the 40 percent increase in supplies and services, not totally knowing what those are — I know the minister did outline some briefly — and also the purchase of fixed assets, assuming that these are for the departmental services. I'll express my concern about those as we go along.

The other area is in the offices of the two deputy ministers: finance, administration, planning, and evaluation. There is a considerable increase there, and there is a considerable increase in vote 1 overall. I'm just concerned as to the increase in administration costs is what the projection is as far as the student increase during the next year in our schools and the reasons we want to extract so much money into those types of programs rather than in other areas which I'll develop as we go along here.

To be very explicit also, there are of course the areas of regional offices, where there's a considerable increase in Grande Prairie and so on. I assume these are the areas of administrative people. I guess the question I would raise as to the increase in administration costs is what the projection is as far as the student increase during the next year in our schools and the reasons we want to extract so much money into those types of programs rather than in other areas which I'll develop as we go along here.

Some of the areas that I would like to briefly touch on relate to the School Act review, how we're coming along with this and the time frame for having this presented to the Legislature for any changes that may be proposed, when that might come in. I know that teachers and boards in the communities are concerned that we've talked about this and it hasn't been brought forward at this time. I'm sure the minister is quite aware of that.

The other area is community schools. Having had a very large constituency over the last number of years, both as an alderman and as a member of the Legislature, I had the opportunity to deal with 29 schools in the last year in particular. I visited each and every one of those at least once and up to three times during the last year. At the time my constituency was split, I had four community schools; now I have none. It is a program that is very, very much desired by the community. The one concern of some administrators and teachers at the school level is that it does create additional work for them. At the same time, we provide co-ordinators in these programs to assist in developing the types of programs that may be needed in the community.

There are certain instances and circumstances we should be looking at as to why we would plug in a school as a community school in any given circumstances rather than just plugging in a school when we see fit. There are situations in our communities where there are young people who have English as a second language. Because of the difficulties some of these families are in as far as single-parent families,

et cetera — economics certainly does come into some of these pictures — some of these areas in developing community schools would not only enhance the school itself and possibly the educational programs without a great deal of cost but would certainly enhance the overall picture in the community at large.

I must indicate to the minister, as I have done to other ministers in that same portfolio over the years, that I am one of these complete supporters of community schools. They are certainly not the end-all, but they come closer to it than most other things. In the rural areas, I know that the concept is basically there because of the close-knit communities. In the larger cities, of course, it doesn't occur. As such, the community school program enhances the overall picture of both the school and the community at large. I can assure the minister of my complete support for that and also an expansion of that concept at the earliest possible time in all constituencies, more particularly in Calgary McCall.

Mr. Chairman, as I have done for the last four years, I would like to again indicate the concern that we're not progressing fast enough. I would like to ask the minister if she can comment — if not here, at a later time — regarding the funding for our additional high school which is in northeast Calgary. At this point in time, it's not being developed in Calgary McCall as that part was split off. However, it's going to impact the McCall constituency a great deal. Even those people who are now in the new constituency of Calgary Montrose, many of my friends — as I represented that area for some nine years, I'm certainly still supportive of those people, as I always have been, and would like to see that high school developed at the earliest possible time.

In addition, there has been a request from the public school board in Calgary for another elementary school in the Falconridge community. This is extremely important to that community, as we have a number of children that are in many cases slower learners due to the fact that they have grown up or commenced their young lives with another language. English being a second language, it certainly enhances them as far as learning abilities when they can do so close to home and take part in the community activities.

I would like to briefly touch on some of the areas that I view in the schools as I visit them on occasion. First of all, I'd like to talk in general terms about the teachers in our schools. I'll talk about those in the 29 schools that I have represented over the last years. First of all, the program for bringing first-year teachers into an apprenticeship-type activity, you might say, has been very well accepted in the schools by teachers, principals, and certainly administrators. The teachers are extremely confident, at least those ones I've talked to, that this program will not only enhance the education system as such but will if necessary weed out at an early time people who may not make the grade, rather than weaken the faculty in the school at a later date when the pressure is on and a top-notch teacher is required.

I've said this on many occasions, and I'd just like to repeat it: in our constituency we have some very good and dedicated teachers who not only have an interest in their teaching ability and the teaching of the students they try to teach; they have a vested interest in our community. They have their own students attending schools in those communities. Of course, with their participation in the community, their long-term commitment, both to the community and as teachers, is very much appreciated by our parents and myself. Without that commitment our community

is not going to be the same quality as it is right now. Notwithstanding that of course, many of those teachers participate in activities outside the realm of the school, participate in sports programs and working with young children after the school has concluded for the day or even for the long summer.

Mr. Chairman, I indicated before some concerns I have relevant to the expenditure of some of the moneys in the programs, as I outlined very briefly to start my comments off. In general terms I think it's commendable that in a time of limited revenue and constraints, the government can come in with a 4.5 percent increase in the overall budget programs. In fact, the total increase is 5.2 percent, notwithstanding that part of that is capital programs.

In going back to a comment that I made about some people being empire-builders, I've made that many, many times over the years, both here and also in city council, where I was a little stronger in my choice of words than I will be here today. I have certain concerns about — I'll repeat the word — empire-builders. I will continue to have those concerns when I see these kinds of increases which really bother me a lot. Rather than putting money into administrative functions, we could be forwarding it to programs that will help the community, to areas such as the development of additional product in community schools and early childhood services. I know there is an increase in the budget in grants to early childhood programs, although I notice in vote 3 that there is a decrease in the program development area of early childhood services, which I might question.

I think one of the most important areas that we need to give consideration to is the development of further library services in our schools. Libraries in Alberta schools are in the main very good, and I speak specifically of those in Calgary and Calgary McCall in particular. But in many cases we have a shortage of titles and material for students to participate with. As we develop and ask students to become a little more independent and search out their own study material, it is incumbent upon us to ensure they have materials and fact-finding information available that they can use for those studies.

With that in mind, I feel very strongly that we need to not only ensure that our library services continue to be amongst the highest standards anywhere but also improve them so they continue to be of the highest standard. Therefore, I would recommend that in future budgets we examine the administrative circumstance we're looking at here against those types of activities. I know it's a very narrow area in the three particular areas I've indicated, but certainly those are just an example, rather than my trying to stand up here for the next half hour indicating all the programs. With all the teachers we have in the House, I'm sure they can indicate certain areas that they have worked in over the years.

I might just mention that the man-year authorization has been increased tremendously, an additional 23 man-years, even though the full-time members have decreased. Again, that relates back to the empire-building that I suggested.

I know there are going to be some comments relative to increasing grants to private schools. I personally don't have a great problem with that, because I think our students should be given every opportunity to be educated in the fashion their parents desire. At the same time, I hope it isn't perceived that there is some depreciation in the value of the public education system. In general terms, I think we have a good education system. Generally, we have really

good teachers who are trying to function as best they can in the areas they are able to do so.

In closing, I might remark that when I indicated the three areas of additional support, I think we should also be looking in the area of sciences. Sciences being developed in our high schools, in particular, are extremely important for the future of our young people. Sciences are going to become one of the more predominant industries, if I can use that term, in the future. As we know, one of the shortfalls in the world right now is good, competent scientists. I'm sure that by giving resources to the science areas in the schools, we can facilitate the people who wish to participate there and also maybe change the direction of some student who really doesn't know which way to go. I think the interest that could be shown in the sciences certainly would enhance their careers and their future.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, with those few concerns that I have and the positive areas, generally speaking I think we have an education system that is probably second to none in Canada and maybe North America. We should all be proud of the participation of this government in both dollars and expertise in our educational institutions. We should encourage those people who are educating our children to keep up a job that has been well done over the years and I'm sure will be in the future.

Thank you.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I would like to thank the Member for Calgary McCall. As an arts graduate, I agree with him that science is important, but it's not the be-all and end-all. I hope he will take that in the vein that I give it.

I will also say that I stand as a proponent of the public education system and always will, Mr. Chairman. With respect to his comments about empire-builders, I agree with him; it's a very bad step to take. I would argue with him that that is not the case in the Department of Education but hope that we would be judged by our performance.

In respect of the student population which he raised, although it has been relatively flat and in fact shading down a bit, the effect of people like me who are the baby-boomers will be coming into the forecasting in that system over the next decade. So we can see that some of the difficulties which school boards have faced as a result of declining population may be ameliorated to some degree over the next while.

The School Act review: I indicated in my opening remarks that after a wealth of public input, it is now under review. I will be presenting the framework document before legislation, and that will take place in the spring of '87.

With respect to the man-year authorization, I'm glad the hon. member raised it, because although our permanent positions have fallen by 16, we have, as he notes, raised the man-year authorization by 23. I think it's important to note where those man-years are being allocated. It's primarily in the secondary curriculum; that is, going out and hiring primarily teachers who may not have a job currently or who are teaching within school jurisdictions and want to be part of this curriculum-writing exercise. I support that being done on a man-year basis which has an automatic sunset clause provision. I think it's a good program for employing in the field. I know the concern of the hon. member, but I think there's a justification in this instance.

With respect to supplies and services: a 40.3 percent increase, as he has noted, primarily due to the secondary education curriculum review, the committee on teaching standards, and to a lesser degree, for consultation and

assessment services provided by the response centres. So there is a reason for that supplies and services; it's not the fixed assets, which is a different question.

The increase in fixed assets is very high. Our department has established an educational bulletin board system, which will link school boards, regional offices, and our department, utilizing a University of Alberta developed system. I think it's an important communication link amongst school boards and will in fact be an important teaching link in terms of a computer linkup with education. The branches involved in the implementation of the Secondary Education Review and staff of the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards are using computer systems for data storage, networking, and word processing in their very important job of reviewing the curriculum. I think that's an important technological use of that system.

As well, we are dealing with the reality that purchased equipment is cheaper in the long run than the leasing arrangements which we had earlier. In an overall attempt at fiscal control, the public works department has directed that purchase as opposed to lease be considered where possible. Finally, I would note that despite the increased purchases by government, private industry continues to lead in the acquisition of this technology.

Thank you.

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to commence with an offer of congratulations to the minister on her appointment and echo the earlier comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton Avonmore to indicate that I, too, concur that she will be open, receptive, and concerned in dealing with what is in many ways the most important portfolio in this province. There are a number of topics I would like to cover, and I would appreciate response from the minister with respect to her approach to these issues if time permits. I see that we have approximately 19 minutes left before breaking for third reading of several Bills.

The most important issue with which I wish to deal is that of private school funding; that is because it deals with the structure of our school system. I dealt with this in the throne speech, and I propose to deal with it again because of the fundamental importance it has for the future of our province. As I indicated in the throne speech, I believe that the most significant error in education policy during the tenure of this government was its decision in the mid-1970s to commence generous funding of private schools. It's the position of the Liberal Party that this funding should be phased out.

I would like to clarify that when I refer to private schools, I'm referring not to those schools which deal with learning problems and other needs of children but rather those schools to which parents send their children as a matter of choice. It is my view that there is no single issue over which we have control that will have more impact on the future shape of our society, because it involves the way in which our children go to school, either together or segregated. If you change the way in which they go to school, you change the kind of people that are produced and the kind of society which we have.

What is at stake for our community and for public education if we publicly fund private schools? Let me be clear at the outset that I support the right of parents to send their children to private schools at their own expense. However, I believe the government does a disservice to this province by encouraging the growth of private schooling by means of public funding. The central issue is the kind

of society that we wish to bequeath to our children and grandchildren. The shape of the school system is going to determine the nature of society in the future, and if we segregate children from each other in private schools on the basis of religion, race, or wealth, we are ultimately going to end up with a society divided in this manner as well.

Accordingly, the heart of our education policy should be to protect and improve our public school system. Public moneys should be used to bring children together, not to increase traditional social divisions. We pay taxes to support public schooling because of the collective benefits we get as a community, in the same way that we pay for defence and transport, but not to send our own children to school. Thus the public school is open to all children, and the desire for a private education is a private matter which serves private interests and not the overall public good; it is one which should be funded privately.

From its inception, the public school model has had a social mission. It was designed to mix children and to help overcome the traditional divisions of religion, race, and wealth that have historically plagued mankind and still cause major problems in many nations. It performs this mission by ensuring that every child has equal access to all schools and equality of opportunity regardless of religion, race, or economic status. It provides the best possible protection against future intolerance and the development of a class system in our society by having children go to school together and get to know each other. The Ghitter report states that

a strong and open public educational system is the best armor against unacceptable intolerance, lack of understanding, discrimination and stereotyping.

In Canada it has been our policy for most of this century not to encourage or fund private, segregated schools. Such schools have been able to exist, but parents had to pay the cost. This was the wise policy which was established at a time when religious and racial intolerance was a fact of daily life, and five Canadian provinces still refuse to fund private schools. This has, I might note, been the policy in the United States as well, and indeed it's unconstitutional to fund religious schools in that nation. Of course, they saw for years the results of segregating black and white children in public schools, and at the very time when they have been going through contortions to desegregate blacks and whites, we are now moving our school system in the direction of segregation.

In Alberta, private schools received nil or negligible funding from the time of our admission to Confederation in 1905 until the mid-1970s. At that time, the provincial government, discovering that it had apparently been wrong all those many years, commenced a generous program of funding for private schools. Such funding has now reached \$1,400 per student. It is over \$16,182,300 in the present year, and the private schools are pressing for more. As I mentioned, I believe this change is the most important change in education policy in the history of our province.

I would note that in this budget we see continuing growth. Direct grants to private schools are up 8.2 percent, whereas direct grants to all other forms of schooling are in the 4 percent range. We are also aware, Mr. Chairman, that private schools are eligible for other types of perks which make it easier for these schools to exist. For example, the internship program benefits are available to private schools, and private schools benefitted from the capacity to send children to Expo. And we note that there is a constant

pressure for more money. The former Minister of Education wanted to increase the grants significantly, and of course once you accept the principle of public funding and that there is a public benefit by having these schools, you will find that in the long run it is very difficult to place a lid on the amount of funding that is provided.

The result of this funding has been a tremendous growth in the number of private schools, mainly religious-based, over the last 10 years. The number of students in private schools has increased from 1.3 percent of the school population to approximately 3 percent in the current year, and there are now over 12,500 students in private schools in Alberta. This rate of increase is really the concern. While the absolute numbers are small, we're moving in the direction where at the continued rate, 32 percent of students will be in private schools in 25 years. It will require far less than that. Once we get in the range of 7, 8, 9, or 10 percent, we will have a situation which will become politically irreversible. With this growth trend, we run the risk of becoming a society in which it becomes the norm for children of different religions and races to attend segregated schools. Mormons, Sikhs, Orientals, different Christian denominations, Moslems, East Indians: all in segregated schools. This is a formula for future social divisions, Mr. Chairman, and it is being encouraged by public funding.

Similarly, by providing public funding we encourage the growth of elitist schools. Unlike religious or ethnic schools, schools such as Strathcona-Tweedsmuir in Calgary, which charges tuition in the \$5,000 range, inevitably segregate on the basis of economic class. Over time the growth of a system of such schools, with even lesser tuition than Tweedsmuir but encouraged and made possible by public funding, will lead us in the direction of a class system in this country as it has in England. Equality of opportunity, one of the features of life in Canada, will be imperiled. Ultimately — and I say ultimately because we have to have foresight in this regard; we're looking at the type of society we're going to leave for future generations in 50 or 100 years — we'll end up with a weakened, second-class public school system serving mainly economically disadvantaged or problem children. That's the direction we're moving in.

On top of this, there are problems that we have to ask ourselves. What do we do when groups such as scientologists or perhaps even the disciples of the Bhagwan seek funding for their private schools? Indeed, Scientology supporters already get public funding for a private school here in Edmonton. For teachers in the House, there's also a very interesting question about open job access for teachers. Will future applicants for teaching jobs be required to demonstrate the appropriate degree of religious or racial orthodoxy before getting a job in a variety of religious and ethnic schools?

The public school system, Mr. Chairman, is indeed a treasure of our society, which has contributed very much to our fine community. We must maintain and improve it while at the same time providing greater diversity and choice of programs that do not segregate children on the basis of race, religion, or wealth. We already have within our school system a myriad of these programs, such as French immersion, the international baccalaureate program, and others, which provide a very healthy degree of competition within the public school system. This is not a perfect world, and some choices have to be made which will dissatisfy some. However, when private school supporters argue for their rights, we must commensurately think of the rights of all children and grandchildren in the future, because no other decision we make today is going to affect the future of

their lives as much as this one. It concerns the kind of people that they will live with. Accordingly, I very strongly urge the phasing out of public funding of private schools.

There are a number of other topics I would like to deal with, but in light of time constraints I'm going to deal with one which has been raised by a constituent. It relates to education opportunities for mentally handicapped students. The Calgary public school board teaches children up to the age of 18, mentally handicapped or otherwise. At that point in time, the program ceases and these children are not taught. Some mentally handicapped children are not capable of benefitting from further academic or quasi-academic schooling. However, it has been brought to my attention that there are a number who would benefit. There are seven or eight identified at the present time who have just come out of the public school system, but there's no program for them. There is apparently a program at Mount Royal College that deals with these children once they have attained the age of 20, but there appears to be a hiatus. Even that program at Mount Royal College has apparently been cut down in terms of the number of years. This is a very difficult situation. It raises many implications and issues, but I would urge the hon. minister to review the matter and see whether something could be done about it.

There is also the question of standards in private schools, Mr. Chairman. Society has a responsibility that all children receive an adequate education. If the world were perfect, of course all children would be looked after properly by their parents, but as we're aware, it isn't. Some parents assault their children or neglect them, and society intervenes. Similarly, experience shows us that standards are necessary in education. Thus I very strongly urge the minister to ensure that minimum standards are achieved in terms of both curriculum and quality of teaching in all private schools, regardless of whether or not they are funded. I'd like to make it clear that if parents wish to have religious or ethnic input to their education, I believe this should be possible in these private schools. However, I don't believe that this additional form of input is incompatible with prescribing minimum curriculum standards for each child so that they will be assured of an opportunity to learn such basics as are needed for life in our community. The government has unfortunately been lax in the past in monitoring the curriculum, Mr. Chairman, and I hope that it will do a better job in the future for our children.

In dealing with specifics, we also need to ensure that category 4 schools are no longer able to hire teachers who are not qualified. The fact that this category has not received funding is no reason that the children should not be entitled to the minimum standards of education of all other children in the province. This is a category which should never have been established and shouldn't exist.

We're also aware of a number of illegal schools which won't even recognize government jurisdiction. I gather prosecutions are in process. The government was slow to recognize this problem at its inception and, instead of nipping it in the bud, allowed it to develop into a problem of major proportions. I hope that it will proceed to deal with this problem very, very firmly and directly.

There was a question of choices and options that I would like to comment on, Mr. Chairman. It is often argued that private schools are necessary to provide choices and options and that advocates of public schooling like myself are not in favour of diversity. In fact, I am very much in favour of diversity, choices, and options, provided that one condition is satisfied: that we don't segregate our children from each

other on the basis of race, religion, or wealth in such schools. As I noted earlier, we have many very acceptable choices which are not segregated: the French bilingual and immersion programs, programs in different languages, and the international baccalaureate program, which I know is very popular in Calgary. I believe it is healthy for the community to have programs of this popularity; they provide healthy competition. I'm aware of the competition within schools in Calgary in attempting to attract students by the quality of their schools, and I think this is a healthy direction to go. It's a very, very sensible answer to the arguments of private school advocates that we need a system which will inherently destroy or seriously weaken the public school system in order to provide that form of competition, because it just isn't so.

In terms of French education, Mr. Chairman, I think it's very favourably inclined. I believe the growth in French schooling has contributed a great deal to our education and to our community, and it's important that we work to meet the growing needs of our community for French education. I would like to note that whatever form that takes — and I know there are some difficult choices that have to be made — I'd like to see it take a form in which we ensure to the greatest extent possible that children not be segregated from each other on the basis of their racial background or religion through the structuring of the programs. It will require a great effort, but I'm sure that we can do it.

One problem with respect to the French program: obviously we need more training of teachers. Possibly we might consider more exchange programs with Quebec and possibly France. A problem is that of inadequate facilities in some rural areas. I've had it brought to my attention that some parents in rural areas in particular have had to pay significant fees to send their children to those programs in adjacent areas. One example is children just outside Red Deer having to pay fees in Red Deer. I think it's important that there be greater co-ordination between the jurisdictions to make sure that parents are able to benefit from this education when they need it.

In terms of special education, there has been an increased awareness of learning disabilities and their effects on children. It's been recognized that children of average intelligence or even gifted children can experience learning difficulties. We have realized that we have the capacity to teach these children, and the quality of their lives and their very futures can be enhanced by such teaching. There are some problems, one in the rural areas as I noted earlier during question period. Parents in the Rocky View district have raised problems with respect to the lateness of diagnosis of these problems, inadequate teaching once the problems have been recognized, and problems in getting remedial treatment by experts, such as at the Foothills Academy. These must be addressed.

There is also the question of the Foothills Academy, which is a private school based on need which I have no objection to funding. We're moving rapidly in the area of special learning needs, Mr. Chairman, and our aspirations sometimes exceed our capacity to meet these needs. I'm aware that the Foothills Academy has been very successful. It's popular with parents, it's met the test of the marketplace, and it has expertise. Yet instead of tapping it, we have implemented a new funding mechanism whereby — in fact, I would note for the information of the hon. minister that its funding will be reduced by approximately two-thirds this year and the money given to the public schools for distribution. I would suggest that this is a matter which perhaps

might be reviewed to see whether the expertise and dedication of the people at this fine school can be harnessed for the good of more children in the future.

Thank you.

MR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. MUSGREAVE: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the report and the request for leave to sit again, does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

MR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Speaker, by an agreement among the House leaders, third reading of two Bills will proceed now. Because it will likely take beyond 5:30, I would ask that the Assembly now agree to stop the clock at 5:30?

[Motion carried]

head: GOVERNMENT BILLS AND ORDERS (Third Reading)

Bill 12 Farm Credit Stability Fund Act

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, this is a memorable time for all members of the Assembly, to put in place this very important Bill. Accordingly, I move that Bill 12, the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act, now be read a third time.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could beg leave to speak in a general sense about both Bills. It would be quicker, and the comments that I have to make affect both. Okay, I'll speak to the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act.

We would like to establish that our party feels compelled to support this Act in principle. We feel that we have absolutely no other choice. The desperate situation being confronted by farmers in this province dictates that support of this Bill is entirely in order. [some applause] Thank you. Not so soon.

We do, however, have certain grave misgivings about whether this Bill and the Bill to follow, which is somewhat like it, will be able to achieve any kind of effect or the positive results that are being contemplated in some vague unspecified way by this government. We simply have no way of knowing whether they will achieve any kind of objective. Further, we have no way of knowing what objective this Bill is to achieve. Our concerns lie in the fact that when we approve this Bill, we are in fact approving only so much fluff. The substance of the Act will lie in regulations that will be prepared by civil servants behind closed doors potentially without adequate review by this Legislature.

In making this point, we would like to illustrate our point with the recent energy program, the \$200 million incentive package, which does not seem to have had an effect. It certainly does not seem to have had the effect for which it was apparently designed. It takes time for people to realize that the effect has not been achieved, and in the area of the farm and agricultural industry, that is time we cannot afford to waste.

Mr. Speaker, we are saying that the principle is good; let's be certain that we implement this Act properly. We therefore ask assurances from this government that the regulations, which will become the substance of this Act, be presented to this House for adequate disclosure and discussion.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to third reading of Bill 12, the Farm Credit Stability Act, I would like to point out that we in this caucus have at every stage tried to facilitate the rapid implementation of this important piece of legislation. In so doing, we've expressed a number of legitimate concerns, suggested some alternatives, and tried the other night to make some amendments. I think it's absolutely crucial that the government take some bold steps in the area of farm credit, because there are desperate situations in rural Alberta that need to be addressed now. I remind members in the most sincere way that if we attempt to head off the farm debt crisis at the pass with a long-term, low-interest finance program with a rate of 9 percent, it is, if you could forgive the analogy, rather like putting a potato in the oven and trying to bake it at room temperature.

We have done our best to try to move this Bill along, and I would like to express one grave reservation, as I did the other night. Our concern lies as much with what is not in the Bill as with what is in the Bill. There is fear in rural Alberta about what conditions will be placed on distribution of funds under the program, how it will be implemented, and how it will be delivered. The concern expressed is that those who qualify won't need the money and those who need it won't qualify. These are our concerns, and I think our job will be to be very vigilant in how the program is implemented and delivered to rural Alberta.

I urge my colleagues to support Bill 12 in its third and final reading.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, we in the Representative Party want to support this Bill and encourage the minister. We've had the opportunity through question period and discussion to look at some of the principles, and certainly the direction is right. Most likely the discussion we will have in the next month will be with regard to the implementation and the feedback we will receive from various individual farmers, corporations, or partnerships that are covered within the program.

I'd like to suggest to the minister, Mr. Speaker, that possibly in his remarks on third reading, he could suggest to the Assembly a way that all parties could come together with the minister informally or in some arrangement at some point in time — I would suggest the end of August or first week in September — so that we as members of this Legislature have a way by which we can present some individual concerns as well as broader concerns on the program after it's been tested in the field. We can certainly do it through the question period and banter back and forth across the floor, but I think this is maybe a little different situation than normal. To expedite it, and that's what we

all want to do in this Assembly, I would suggest to the minister that he make some commitment today that about the first week of September he would call an informal meeting of the Committee of the Whole — I'm not sure what the format would be — either in the Assembly or in an appropriate place outside of the Assembly where we could all sit down in a very mature way and discuss the input that has come from the general farming community as well as the small business community as we relate to the other Act in a few moments.

MR. SPEAKER: May the minister conclude the debate?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, first of all let me express my appreciation for the very valid recommendations, criticism, and advice on this legislation. In listening to discussion through the past few days, discussion on the legislation and some of the exchanges which have taken place in question period, I think it is obvious to all members that this is a very complex piece of legislation, not so much the legislation itself but the way in which this piece of legislation will be implemented and affect the very vital agricultural sector in Alberta. I wish I could say that it was perfect, but of course that would be close to infallibility. I can not give you that suggestion. I can simply say that we are attempting wherever possible to make this as responsive and as workable as we can with the time, resources, and ability that we have.

In that context, I would not want to leave the impression that this is a perfect way to either address the problem or for that matter proceed with the legislation, because of the very clear weaknesses which have been pointed out; that is, the absence of clear regulations and to some extent the absence of eligibility tests and the way in which the program will be conducted. That's fair criticism, but at the same time there is a reason that is taking place. We are in the process of discussing, updating, and performing a series of adjustments to the way in which the program will operate almost on a hour-to-hour basis. Any feedback we get from farmers or institutions or from discussion in the House is of course reflected back in those documents. So it isn't that we're attempting to remove the information from the Legislature; it's just a question that the process is unfolding so rapidly that it's difficult right now to have a perfect picture as to how the program will operate.

I can give my clear commitment that it will of course be as broad as possible, it will deal with the problems in the farming community, and it will provide a significant opportunity for the farming community to revitalize itself through this difficult period, to have an opportunity to ride through this current period of uncertainty, and to improve and to strengthen over the three- to five-year period. Our objective is to revitalize completely over a 20-year period.

The recommendation from the Member for Little Bow is well received, and I would be prepared to listen to further comments from all members once the program is up and running. I'm not too sure what mechanism is recommended either, except to say that if there is one, we would be glad to provide that opportunity.

Let me indicate, Mr. Speaker, noting the imperfections in the process but recognizing the importance of the legislation to the Alberta farming community, that this government is responding. It is attempting to bring to the farming community a sense of financial security: 9 percent

money for 20 years. I think this bias towards action is a better alternative than trying to think through a perfect system. We could be here for two or three years trying to get a perfect system to operate. Therefore, on balance we believe that the program will run. I've devoted an awful lot of time to making sure that the program will be operative and viable. My colleague the Minister of Agriculture has been very helpful, as has the former Minister of Agriculture, who was involved in the genesis of the approach to this program.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's a significant day for Alberta, for the farming community in particular, when we can use the resources of this province to support this very, very important sector. I encourage all members to support Bill 12, the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act, on third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 14

Small Business Term Assistance Fund Act

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 14, the Small Business Term Assistance Fund Act, now be read a third time.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: I'll try and keep my remarks brief Mr. Speaker. We've debated this Bill twice already. At Committee of the Whole we presented some constructive amendments, brought those forward for consideration by the Assembly. But we didn't make those amendments for the sake of making amendments; we're concerned about the difference between pretense and substance.

There is a track record that we've experienced in the past number of years in this province where certain things are promised and don't always work out quite the way they were intended to in theory. For example, we had a major election program of mortgage subsidies to help people meet their mortgage payments. The substance of that was that rates dropped very quickly, and the program was over in a short period of time. Small business equity corporations: the pretense of the Bill was that substantial new investment would be created in Alberta; there would be a growth of business and economic activity. We'll know the substance if and when the government releases information which we've requested in this Assembly, but until then it would seem the biggest economic activity surrounding SBECs has been their turnover from one owner to the other. Alberta Opportunity Company: the pretense of the company is that it will get business over the hurdles and onto sound footing as a lender of last resort. No doubt some businesses in this province have been helped by that corporation, but the substance is also that companies like Lyon Mountain are being put into receivership. ASSP: again, economic activity will be created in Alberta. The substance is that we hope so, but at least one provisional certificate of eligibility is for economic development in southern California.

Bill 14, Mr. Speaker: the pretense of the Bill is to aid small business in Alberta. The substance is left to section 13, which places all the major ground rules in the hands of cabinet and the bureaucracy. So we proposed an omnibus amendment to give substance to this Bill. One, we proposed a definition of small business; none exists in this Bill. Two, we targeted four specific purposes of the Act: (a) aid in the strengthening of small business generally in Alberta, (b) facilitate the creation of new jobs for Albertans, (c) facilitate the diversification of the economy of Alberta, and (d)

facilitate the economic development of less economically developed regions of Alberta. Substance to the program. Thirdly, and perhaps most crucial, we proposed a reduced interest rate under this program from 9 percent to 6 percent in order to give greater substance to the aid provided small business under this fund. Fourthly, we feel that a financial report needs to be provided to this Assembly by the Auditor General. But more important than simply a financial report, we wanted his opinion on the success of the fund in meeting the four objectives we targeted in our amendment. Again, to provide greater substance to the matter of accountability and public review.

Mr. Speaker, on the pretense of the Bill, that it will aid small business, we will support the government and will assist in getting this legislation through the House; on the substance of the Bill, we remain skeptical. Thank you.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would once again like to establish our support for this Bill in principle and simply reiterate briefly the concerns we had with the previously discussed Bill. My concerns are somewhat diminished. I accept the minister's commitment at face value. I am certain that his government is moving with the most positive intentions and that it would be his intention to discuss openly and listen to input from the opposition benches concerning the regulations. I appreciate that, and my party appreciates that.

I would like to emphasize again the need for that review of regulations. I illustrate that need with a comparison of the track record of the Alberta Opportunity Company, which was able to place \$400 million over the last 14 years, compared with this \$750 million, which is proposed to be placed within 3 years. That certainly conjures up the question of criteria. Clearly criteria will bear greatly on how quickly and to what extent that money can be placed. In considering the criteria, we would raise at least three factors: one, the balance between encouraging new enterprise to create new jobs rather than simply helping existing enterprise make more money when existing jobs are not at stake in existing enterprises; secondly, to create an emphasis or a balance between creating and maintaining jobs, not simply providing found money for already successful firms; thirdly, striking a balance between companies requiring assets in order to qualify for loans versus an assessment of their ability to pay to qualify for loans.

This Act seems like a very good idea. Our belief is that it could become a great idea. The minister's assurances that it will be reviewed openly in this House will, I am certain, assist in ensuring that it will become a great idea. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: May the minister conclude debate?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, only a few comments to again mark the very significant completion of both a campaign and a government promise to come to the assistance of the private sector, the small business sector in this province. Although the Member for Calgary Mountain View criticized some of the very imaginative and creative ways in which this government has responded to the private sector's needs, some of these programs are unique to Canada and were devised to meet the needs of the private sector in Alberta. It is not true, of course, that we our track record is poor. In fact, in looking at it carefully, you'll

see that in the sense of responding to the private sector, this government has outstripped any other government in Canada and perhaps in North America in ensuring that it is the private sector that contributes to the economic growth of this province and in particular recognizes the very vital contribution made by small businesses across the province.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this government does have a bias to action. It is a government of its word and a government which fulfills its commitments as it has promised. This legislation will generate new jobs and sustain economic growth for this province. This legislation will sustain existing jobs now in place in this province and will serve to strengthen the very vital private-sector, small business part of our very important province.

Again with respect to the uncertainties, with respect to the eligibility test, there has been a lot of opportunity to discuss that, both in question period and in the exchanges in the House. As I said before, the eligibility will be as wide as possible. The major criteria in both of these programs, this one in particular, will be ability to pay. We will take a great deal more risks in terms of security than

has ever been offered before to any private-sector group in this province. I am confident that this program, coupled with the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act, will have a very revitalizing influence on this economy.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move — I hope with the support of all members — third reading of Bill 14, the Small Business Term Assistance Fund Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

MR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly now adjourn until tomorrow afternoon at 2:30.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? The motion is carried.

[At 5:37 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 4, the House adjourned to Thursday at 2:30 p.m.]