

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Title: **Tuesday, November 24, 1987 2:30 p.m.**
 Date: 87/11/24

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRAYERS

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country.

Amen.

head: PRESENTING PETITIONS

MS LAING: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present to this Assembly a petition signed by over 8,300 Albertans requesting, among other things, that Alberta be declared a nuclear weapons free zone.

head: READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, may I respectfully request that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received by this Assembly.

CLERK:

To the honourable Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Legislature assembled:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Assembly may be pleased to establish a committee to investigate and report on guidelines for defining what would constitute government regulatory negligence with respect to the failures of First Investors and Associated Investors of Canada and, should negligence be found, resolve how Alberta investors in these two companies should be compensated for this negligence.

head: NOTICES OF MOTIONS

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I request the unanimous consent of this Assembly that through you this Assembly convey to the Edmonton Eskimos its very good wishes for the success of the Eskimos in their contest this weekend for the Grey Cup. [applause]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair takes it that the response indicates unanimous consent, but the Chair also questions whether the Deputy Premier this year would like to make some statement about another team or . . . I assume that . . .

Let the record show that the motion passes unanimously.

head: INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 245
Class Action Act

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 245,

the Class Action Act.

This Bill would provide for the right of class actions to be brought on behalf of groups of individuals with similar claims and would in particular facilitate the consolidation of actions in respect of the Principal Group affair.

[Leave granted; Bill 245 read a first time]

head: TABLING RETURNS AND REPORTS

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table the Alberta Liberal opposition's green paper on the financial industry in Alberta, which we released on October 26, 1987, on which we held public hearings on the financial industry across the province.

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table several annual reports required by statute: the annual reports of Mount Royal College, the Alberta College of Art, Lethbridge Community College, Olds College, Lakeland College, and Fairview College.

MR. SHABEN: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the annual report of the Alberta Opportunity Company.

As well, I wish to table responses to two motions for returns, 208 and 212, as ordered by the Assembly.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the 24th annual report of the Racing Commission.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act, I am tabling members' services orders 7, 8, and 9 of 1987.

head: INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

MR. SHABEN: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce four people who are seated in your gallery today. These are visitors from Japan. First, I'd like to ask them to rise individually as I introduce them. First, I'd like to introduce Mr. Shoji Ushiki. Mr. Ushiki is with -- and all four gentlemen are with -- Nissho Iwai, one of the key trading companies from Japan. They're visiting Alberta as part of a cross-Canada mission and also in response to the recent Alberta mission to Japan. Mr. Ushiki, in addition to heading the delegation, is chairman of the Japan/Canada special business council and chairs the group on agricultural and forestry matters. So it's great to have him with us. With Mr. Ushiki is Mr. Eiji Fujita, Mr. Iwao Okamoto, and Mr. Masao Yamashita. I'd like the members of the Assembly to welcome our guests to Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you today and to the members of the Assembly, a delegation of about a dozen members from the Mill Woods Injured Workers Committee. They are here this afternoon and looking forward to meeting with the minister responsible for the WCB after question period today to discuss their concerns. I'd like to ask them to stand now and receive the warm welcome of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, 44 students from Lorelei elementary school in Glengarry. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Rimney, Mrs. Dane, and Mr. Luard. I'd ask them to rise in the gallery and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly, 22 students from the Londonderry junior high school from the constituency of Edmonton-Belmont.

Mr. Speaker, by way of introduction, if I may, I'd like to advise you that earlier this month this school had the Chief Electoral Officer for Canada visit their school, and they held a mock election. I think all of us will be pleased to know that due to lack of political affiliation, none of us won, but Canadian rock star Luba Kowalchuk is now the Prime Minister or the Premier or the mayor of the city of Edmonton, I'm not sure which.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, they're accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Wolanski. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, a school group from my constituency. There are 60 grade 6 students accompanied by their teachers Cec Race and Rod Howard. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise, if you could give them a warm welcome. Thank you.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, I am privileged again today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, another group of Principal investors. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I hope the House will accord them a warm welcome.

head: ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Free Trade

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct the first question to the Premier. The Premier indicated yesterday that the Mulroney trade agreement would have absolutely no effect on an Alberta government ability to control supply and pricing of our energy resources. The Premier is aware that this is a rather novel interpretation, disagreed with by Mr. Lougheed, Mr. Masse, and many constitutional lawyers in the country. My question is: in view of the fact that the Premier has this interpretation, would he indicate to this Assembly where he has received his information? Is the source of his information Brian Mulroney?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, of course the government in the course of some 18 months, and myself as Premier chairing the premiers throughout these free trade meetings, obviously had a great deal of information which we obtained through our legal experts, our constitutional experts. I want to absolutely make it clear that there is no way that Alberta's ownership, management, or control of its resources is impacted by that trade agreement. [some applause]

MR. MARTIN: The backbenchers are pounding as if they knew

what we were talking about. Mr. Speaker, part of the problem that we're having is that the Premier keeps talking about the Constitution, and I am asking specifically about the Mulroney trade agreement. Now, will the Premier at least confirm that it will be impossible under this agreement for Alberta to receive higher prices in the U.S. market without raising the prices to our own citizens?

MR. GETTY: No, that is not correct, Mr. Speaker. He is wrong.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, again the Premier is the last one in Canada to believe this. But let me ask this question to follow up then. In the Mulroney trade agreement it says clearly that the United States will have nondiscriminatory access to Alberta's energy resources. Nondiscriminatory access. Now, could the Premier explain this, how it is possible to set lower prices for Albertans? Would you not in fact be discriminating against the United States?

MR. GETTY: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, when we're sold out down the way because of this government and we can't do the things we want, it won't be so funny then.

Mr. Speaker, well, let's look at our own Act, the gases preservation Act, again using the nondiscriminatory clause. Would the Premier indicate how he will provide the type of access to the United States market under section 9 of the gases preservation Act, which allows this government to divert export gas when it is required in Alberta? How is he going to do that under the Mulroney trade agreement?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I will say again: Alberta's ownership, management, and control of its resources is not impacted by the trade agreement. If the hon. member would just stretch his mind a little bit, he would know that if we are selling at market prices in North America and somebody wants to pay more to us for some of it, that's perfectly going to be allowed, Mr. Speaker. Without any . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. There's a certain level of repartee involved, but shouting down is a little bit different. The hon. Premier, please continue.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I sit here quietly and listen to their comments, and then when they don't like the answer, they can't stand it.

Mr. Speaker, it's also clear that the Alberta government can provide, under its natural gas rebate plan, lower natural gas prices to consumers in Alberta. We have been able to do it in the past; we're able to do it now. I only ask the hon. member to not spend so much time trying to destroy something that's an incredible opportunity for the people of Alberta.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the Premier. I ask the question in light of comments reported by the minister of energy in this area. The free trade pact specifies in one of the sections that

both sides have agreed to prohibit restrictions on imports or exports, including quantitative restrictions, taxes, minimum import or export price requirements or any other equivalent measure . . .

My question to the Premier, and this relates to a comment of the minister of energy: does the government intend to drop its plans to substitute a percentage royalty on natural gas sales with a floor price on natural gas sales when the gas prices fall below a specified amount?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker. I didn't get the full import of the question, the final part of it. Would you repeat it?

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, in terms of an explanation to the Premier, the question is the control of the price of natural gas in the province. The minister has indicated there may be a floor price implemented, and in terms of the free trade agreement, or terms at this point, that would not be allowed.

MR. GETTY: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we are not working on a floor price for natural gas. But as I already said, we can certainly provide, under our natural gas rebate plan, to the consumers in Alberta lower prices for natural gas.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, this is to the Premier. He says he does not catch the import of the question. I don't think he catches the import of the whole policy of continental energy.

Would the Premier go out on a limb and guarantee that he will not remove the royalty rebate for farm fuels next year? Will he guarantee that the royalty rebate for farm fuels will not be removed in order that he can fulfill his part of the continental energy policy?

MR. GETTY: First, Mr. Speaker, I should welcome the hon. member to the House this year and also thank him for his contribution in Chinook yesterday. I see why both he and the Leader of the Opposition are dressed in black today.

MR. MARTIN: It's blue, Don.

MR. GETTY: It should be black, if it isn't.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, we do not have a royalty rebate program; we have a program to assist our farmers and ranchers with fuel costs.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition, second main question.

MR. OLDRING: A supplementary.

MR. SPEAKER: Pardon me. The Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the Premier. Premier, can you advise the Assembly: is it true that the real concerns coming from the energy issue in this agreement are coming from people like Broadbent in central Canada, who are concerned that they're not going to be able to control our energy any more?

MR. GETTY: There's no question, Mr. Speaker, when you strip away all the rhetoric that we're hearing from a lot of people in Canada, the one thing that becomes clear is that both the Liberal and ND parties, who are interventionists in a philosophical way, can't stand the thought that they wouldn't be able to impose another NE program. And that drives them crazy.

Principal Group Inquiry

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my second question also to Brian Mulroney's fool.

MR. SPEAKER: Parliamentary language. Careful.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, my second question -- and we appreciate the fact that we can ask some questions about the Principal affair; maybe we'll be lucky enough to get some answers today -- is dealing with the potential compensation. The Premier said there would be compensation for the investors. He said that publicly. Now there's a great deal of confusion about what he said, and the confusion has been created by this Premier. Would the Premier indicate if he is saying that regulatory negligence on the part of the government would be sufficient grounds for this government to reimburse the investors?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I dealt with that question yesterday.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, again he's showing, by not wanting to answer, precisely what's going. Let us put it down then. Let us ask this question. He said that if there was negligence by the government, then they will compensate the investors. My question is: who will determine this negligence? Will it be this government behind closed doors, in a very secretive way behind closed doors? Is that who will decide whether it was negligence?

MR. GETTY: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: Well, then my question is to the Premier. Who is going to decide if there was negligence on the part of the government? Could the Premier tell this Assembly and the people of Alberta who is going to decide this?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, there is currently in place a series of ways in which it may be established. The government of Alberta will make sure that if there is negligence laid at our door in causing damage to those investors, we will make up that damage.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough. Let me ask the question. [interjections] No. We want to know what the negligence is. The people of Alberta want to know what constitutes negligence, and all we're getting is gobbledook from this Premier. Now, my question to the Premier is strictly this -- the government was clearly aware that the regulations were not being followed.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. That gets us pretty close to being completely out of order, because we're now getting into the matter that the inquiries are touching upon.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question is to the Premier. If the government was not . . . When the government is proved to be not following their regulations, is this grounds for negligence, and will there be compensation to the investors?

MR. SPEAKER: There's a difficulty there when the hon. Leader of the Opposition changed his words to "when" they are

found from "if" they are found. Therefore, we go on to any supplementary on this matter. That's your fourth.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like a ruling on how you're ruling that order under section 13(2). As we have to follow Standing Orders of this House, I demand that ... [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: It's with regard to 23(a) and (i). and I'm sorry; the interpretation stands. You asked for the notation; that's what it is.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I think my question and supplementary are to the Premier. It's very simple and straightforward. He has used the words "proven negligence." Could the Premier just tell in his own words what he considers proven negligence of the government?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, those words stand on their own. You understand English, don't you?

MR. SPEAKER: The difficulty is a legal interpretation.

Further supplementaries on this question? The Chair recognizes the leader of the Liberal caucus, main question.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Having coming back refreshed with such a huge increase in the vote in the south there, I'm ready to take on the Premier and all the lackeys he has chained up behind him there.

Mr. Speaker, on August 20 the Premier stated that should the government be proven negligent -- as he says, plain English -- and is ordered to repay investors ... I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. In my excitement I've led off with a question that's already covered by the Leader of the Opposition.

Instead, if you'll allow me to retreat, I'll go after the real culprit here. The Premier has goosed the investors that have been in Associated and First for a while, but I want to go after the Treasurer, who took a double whammy. Now, could the Treasurer confirm that two months after his decision to dissolve the First and Associated ...

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. TAYLOR: ... the Principal mutual funds were sold for a net value of \$15 million?

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order is being raised, but I ...

MR. GETTY: The point of order would be that the Premier has not goosed the investors of anybody, and that should be withdrawn, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member ...

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, goosed is all right.

MR. SPEAKER: I won't say the first response that comes to my mind on that issue. The Chair recognizes the Premier on a point of order at the end of question period.

Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, please continue briefly.

MR. TAYLOR: Okay, Mr. Speaker, now that we know what the Premier's done to the investors, could we go on to whether

the Treasurer would confirm that two ...

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, please just get on with the question.

MR. TAYLOR: Would the Treasurer then confirm that two months after the decision to dissolve First and Associated, the Principal Group mutual funds were sold for a net value of about \$15 million? That's an easy one.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, it is likely that the question is entirely out of order. Nevertheless, I think in view of the direction given to the House yesterday, the Chair will reserve judgment on the admissibility of that question and will take it in written form and report back to the House accordingly, hopefully tomorrow at the earliest if possible.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, it was a matter of record. I was trying to lull the Treasurer into a sense of false security there.

But could the Treasurer then please confirm that the same mutual funds were valued at between \$120 million and \$140 million over a year ago by Wood Gundy in a prospectus approved by the Alberta securities department?

MR. SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. member. Same thing. Written form, please. [interjections]

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I've no doubt you would do a better job as Provincial Treasurer, but I'm after the Treasurer ...

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're called to order. One is not supposed to be challenging the Chair, making comments such as that. Please continue with your supplementary.

MR. TAYLOR: All right, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad you're going to let me at him again.

Could the minister please confirm that the value of these mutual funds was eroded dramatically by virtue of the loss of confidence in the Principal Group because of the failure of First and Associated Investors? Could he confirm that?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. You and I are going to have a lot of correspondence. The same thing applies to this question.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I don't know which of us is going to be in the best shape jumping up and down here.

Could the Treasurer explain to the House, in light of the fact that he destroyed a great deal of the value of the investments, why he did not utilize a procedure that you often use in the United States and has been used in Ontario, where the government moved and managed a financial corporation in sustaining its value or maintaining a great deal of its value, to get a lot more back for the investors? Why did he not do that simple procedure?

MR. SPEAKER: Same difficulty. [interjections]

Hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, the Chair is very much aware that you were unable to be in the Chamber yesterday, but hopefully you would be able to read through the exciting version of *Hansard* that was generated yesterday and perhaps look at some of the fine print there in the discussions with all of the

various issues that were dealt with. This is the procedure that the House is going to have to deal with on some of the topics, so I look forward to your four questions in written form, hopefully before the end of the afternoon.

MR. TAYLOR: A point of order. Mr. Speaker. I did read through very carefully. I checked it out [inaudible], and my questions were okay.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member, but I'm afraid it's the opinion of the Chair that has to try to deal with that as the last authority.

The Chair recognizes the leader of the Representative caucus. Next main question.

University of Calgary

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Advanced Education, and it comes from calls from the University of Calgary in terms of the admission policy of students to that faculty. I was wondering if the minister could clarify why the University of Calgary has an open quota system of accepting students from out of province at the present time, to the neglect of some of the Alberta students that would like to enter the Faculty of Medicine.

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I am unable to answer that question in detail today. I'll attempt to get more details, but I can say this, that most of the faculties at the universities of Calgary and Alberta do have quotas. The general admission has been into the faculties of arts and science.

With respect to the percentage of foreign students that are admitted, the board of governors and, I believe, the student bodies as well support the idea of the benefits that accrue from the exchanges that are gained by having foreign students on campus and over the past few years have generally kept foreign enrollment at 5 percent or less.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. My question relates to students from other provinces of Canada. As of 1987, 22 out of 72 seats at the Faculty of Medicine are occupied by students from outside the province of Alberta, from other provinces of Canada. In 1986 it was 13, and 1985 it was 12. In 1988, for which the faculty is now taking applications, the feeling is that the percentage may even be greater. My question to the minister: could he give an indication as to the reason why fewer Alberta students are being accepted in that faculty when we have such a large number of graduates from our high schools?

MR. RUSSELL: No, I can't, Mr. Speaker; the universities are autonomous and self-governing, as the hon. member is aware. But it does work both ways. It would be interesting to compare those figures with enrollments of Alberta residents in other provincial universities.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the minister. Other universities in Canada outside Alberta accept a fixed percentage of students and my information is up to 2 students from Alberta in other medical faculties across Canada. They have a fixed limit. Has the minister had any discussions with the other provinces of Canada in terms of a reciprocal agreement? If there are fixed percentages in other

provinces, why not in Alberta?

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, the only place I'm aware there's a fixed quota in other provinces is in a situation like the school of veterinary medicine in Saskatoon, that is supported by the four western provinces. In return for its financial support the province of Alberta is entitled to so many student spaces. I have never heard before of the issue that is raised by the hon. member today.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary. Would the minister take it upon himself to review the matter with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary, the executive personnel, and report back to the Legislature?

MR. RUSSELL: Well, I'll be glad to do that if the hon. member's office staff is unable to do it. We'll phone the same people and find out the answer.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Advanced Education. Speaking about the concerns at the University of Calgary, can the minister give an explanation to the students at the U of C who are so concerned about cutbacks there that they've gone on a hunger strike? What does he have to say to those people?

MR. RUSSELL: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suppose I could respond with statistics and show them what Alberta support per student is, and on a per capita basis compared with other provinces it is the highest. I could compare the tuition fees that they're paying, which are the second lowest next to the province of Quebec. I suppose those things perhaps might not impress some people, but in my view they're important.

I've discussed with the president of the students' union the matter of the hunger strike. It's a way the students have of bringing public attention, at the student level particularly, to the effect of and the concern they have about cutbacks, which we share.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the quota problems at the University of Calgary which are being discussed arise as a result of financial problems. I'm wondering whether the minister could confirm that the study which he has set in motion with respect to the disparity of funding between universities in Alberta has found that the University of Calgary in fact is suffering from a \$17 million shortfall on a per capita basis in relation to the Edmonton institution?

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referring to what we have called the Dupré study, and I expect that will be made public during the first week of December.

Delayed Opening of Hospitals

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address a question to the minister of hospitals. Earlier this year the Peter Lougheed hospital was turned over to the General hospital to manage, creating a one-hospital, two-site situation. It was indicated that this hospital would be available to open in April 1988, creating great expectations in northeast Calgary and some of the surrounding communities. Would the minister indicate to the many expect-

tant citizens the reasons for the additional suggested delay, and is there any way the minister or his department can determine the validity of this delay?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, the reasons for the delay, which is expected to be perhaps three or four months, is entirely with respect to the provision of certain types and kinds of equipment in the hospital and the construction progress. It's not in any way an unusual delay for a project of this particular size and magnitude, and particularly with regard to the need for the hospital to be compatible in terms of its computer systems and so on with the Calgary General. So it's not something that anyone could have done anything about. Certainly all the funding is in place, and the hospital will open as soon as it's humanly possible for those who are involved to get it completed.

MR. NELSON: Supplementary to the minister, Mr. Speaker. He has partially answered the question that I wish to ask as a supplementary, and I want reassurances. Are the provincial moneys in place to ensure the opening of this hospital if the General hospital is able to do so on the April 1 prediction?

MR. M. MOORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, our government has made a commitment to the opening of the Peter Lougheed hospital. Of course, the operating costs for the next fiscal year are a matter that will be dealt with when the Provincial Treasurer tables his budget sometime in 1988.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, to the minister. When will the minister see that the General board is made up of provincial and city appointees, rather than the present system of city appointees only, to ensure dialogue between the minister and the board is of the highest accord?

MR. M. MOORE: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I should say at the outset that no one should make any suggestions that the dialogue between my office and the chairman and board of the Calgary General hospital at the present time is not of the highest accord. We have had extremely good co-operation from that board throughout the entire operation of moving the responsibility for the Lougheed hospital from the Calgary District Hospital Group to the Calgary General board, and all of us should be very appreciative of the excellent way in which that board has co-operated.

On the second question of when there will be some changes with respect to the manner in which the board is made up: that is a matter that's been discussed between myself and the mayor of the city of Calgary, Mayor Klein, and the chairman of the hospital board, Mr. Halpin. They have agreed that we should bring forward legislation, hopefully in the spring session of the Legislature, which would amend the Calgary General hospital district Act and provide for some form of joint appointments by the provincial government and by the city of Calgary to the board and provide for joint ownership of the Peter Lougheed hospital and the Calgary General hospital. Exactly how that will occur has not yet been decided, but meetings will be held over the course of next few months to determine the nature of the changes that are required . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Older please. Thank you. Hopefully there's something left for a final supplementary.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, just one final supplementary.

Will the minister give assurances that his department will be discussing with the General board on a continuing basis to ensure the people of the northeast area of the city of Calgary and the catchment area of this hospital will have this hospital open at the earliest possible time so as to ensure their health needs?

MR. M. MOORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, that has always been the objective, and the project manager, Mr. Sye Simonson, is working very, very closely with the Calgary General board in order to have the hospital open as soon possible. My review of the situation is that the co-operation on all parts is excellent, and I have no reason to doubt that it won't continue that way.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, given that the Grey Nuns hospital and the Peter Lougheed went together and were basically a joint project, can the minister today stand in his place and guarantee the people of southeast Edmonton that the Grey Nuns hospital will not be delayed any further beyond its original delayed opening of April 1, '88?

MR. M. MOORE: It would be inappropriate, I think, Mr. Speaker, for me to stand in my place and make guarantees about an opening date. I can say that the Edmonton General hospital board and the Grey Nuns have been very effective in altering their programs after decisions were made to alter the Edmonton General hospital to provide extended care beds there and have worked very hard to bring the Mill Woods hospital on stream in April 1988. The present plans are to provide for an official opening of the facility, which would be after it comes into operation in May 1988, and I have no reason to doubt that the board will be able to meet that target.

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, I think it's becoming quite clear that the structure of hospital management in Calgary has become an inefficient mess, with the Calgary board having three, the Foothills hospital standing alone, and the General with two hospitals. In light of the fact that consideration is being given to a review in the structure of the General hospital board, could the minister advise whether there is any thought with respect to making an overall review of the manner in which our board structure operates so that we can operate in the most efficient manner possible?

MR. M. MOORE: Well, I object very strongly, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member's suggestions that there is something wrong with the nature in which Calgary hospital boards have been operating. We have never had such good co-operation from hospital boards as we've had from the Foothills hospital board, the Crown hospital board in Calgary, from the Calgary District Hospital Group, the Calgary General hospital, and the provincial children's hospital in Calgary, in terms of rationalizing programs and saving funds by avoiding duplication and operating hospitals on the basis of fewer programs in each hospital.

I'll conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying this: if the hon. member has some reason to believe that there are hospital boards in Calgary, including the Calgary District Hospital Group or the Calgary General, that aren't doing their level best and doing very well in providing hospital services, let him provide some examples and let him provide some names of the people he'd like replaced.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Kingsway, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Principal Group Inquiry
(continued)

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier, and I'll ask him to guess what topic.

The lifting of the licences of First Investors Corporation and Associated Investors on June 30 by the Treasurer of this province left the savings of some 30,000 Albertans in jeopardy. Many of these people were elderly and had deposited that money to ease their impending retirement. Is the Premier comfortable with the fact that these people have so far received only 30 percent of their money back and will have to wait several years before they get another 30 to 35 percent back?

MR. GETTY: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, nobody wanted to see those investors hurt.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, I'm glad to hear that. Sympathy is cheap, however, and it's best when backed up by some action. Will the Premier authorize the Treasury Branches to advance to those contract holders a further 35 percent of their money through the Treasury Branch system in return for the right of the government to collect that money back from the liquidation process, and will he do it before Christmas?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, that was dealt with yesterday by the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. McEACHERN: No, Mr. Speaker, it was not dealt with by anybody yesterday. The speaker refused to answer it. Some of the contract holders think it's a great idea. I have a letter here from one.

MR. SPEAKER: What's the supplementary question, hon. member?

MR. McEACHERN: The supplementary question is: Mr. Premier, do you think that . . . One of the sort of brush-offs I got yesterday was that the process was already in place. I guess my question is: do you think Coopers & Lybrand or the courts or the investors would object to the government sidestepping that process and reimbursing them now?

MR. SPEAKER: With due respect, hon. member, in *Beauchesne* it's not a matter of asking opinions of gentlemen, please. And the next supplementary you'd like to craft.

MR. McEACHERN: It would be really difficult if the Premier had to give an opinion, wouldn't it?

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. We're early in session, and there's been a fair amount of wide scope with respect to the matter of supplementaries. Let's keep supplementaries the way they're supposed to be. They're questions; not repartee back and forth but questions.

MR. McEACHERN: Mr. Premier, this government of yours rescued the depositors of North West Trust, the depositors of Heritage Trust . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. McEACHERN: I'm getting to the question. . . . the Ed-

monton Savings & Credit Union, and participated in an attempted bailout of CCB. Why are you playing Scrooge with the innocent victims of your own government's negligence?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, obviously the government did not do the things that he led up to in his preamble to his question. But let's be clear about one thing. This group over here or that group there haven't done one thing to help those investors but talk hot air. There's one group in this Legislature who has helped those investors, and it's the government who's helped them by millions and millions and millions of dollars. It's been a careful, considerate, understanding assistance for those investors, and it certainly hasn't been that bunch. [interjections]

MR. STRONG: The Principal Group is really disappointed in you; I would be too.

MR. SPEAKER: If the member makes another statement, the member will be very disappointed at perhaps being suspended from the service of the House.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Little Bow with a supplementary.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, supplementary to the Provincial Treasurer. In light of the original question that was just asked, could the Provincial Treasurer confirm that the government will not intervene in the practices of the Treasury Branch in this province? If that answer cannot be confirmed as yes, then I'd like to advise my constituents to withdraw their savings.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the gentleman would just give the question again so I understand it fully.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, my question, without the added phrase: could the Provincial Treasurer confirm at this time that it's the policy of the government not to intervene in terms of the practices of the Treasury Branch in terms of loans that they may provide for various reasons for various citizens in the province of Alberta?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, that is the policy of the government.

MR. TAYLOR: I'm very pleased to see that the Treasurer wasn't glued to his seat, as he at least got up and said he's going to keep his fingers out of some more financial affairs.

But back to the original supplementary to the Premier: would he not agree that in the spirit of any sort of compassion or human justice, he will make available interest-free loans backed by the government -- it doesn't have to be from the Treasury Branch -- to those people that are suffering or going without? Now, while he diddle-daddles around with two or three investigations to see what's gone wrong in this affair, will he not at least show that amount of compassion? This is Christmas, after all.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. member might know that the government made available money to Principal investors who required it previously. I might also confirm once again that the government is providing assistance in millions and millions and millions of dollars to those investors.

DR. WEST: A supplemental to the Premier. With the recovery

we see in the province of Alberta on a positive trend and the fact that many Albertans who invested in ownership in real estate, farms, and their own homes have lost a great deal of equity over the last few years, could the Premier indicate when he sees a recovery so that their equity will be increasing in the losses that they have taken in the last five years?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true that when you choose not to spend your money and invest it, you either lend it or buy ownership. Now, when you lend it and the company isn't able to pay you back, you've been badly hurt, and I sympathize with that. But it's the company who has done something to you, not the government. Those people who bought equity and have lost -- and many farmers and ranchers and oil industry people have lost 100 percent and have not expected the government to provide them with money. So while we are doing everything possible to help the investors -- and I might say, Mr. Speaker, that it's already been proven that the government's way of moving to allow time for the investors has, by the very word of the receiver, provided them to obtain a greater return than would have been by following the recommendations of the quick bankruptcy and public inquiry.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes Edmonton-Meadowlark and, if there is time, Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One important issue, of course, in the Principal Group affair is whether any of the inquiries that have been structured to this point can possibly result in investors' being compensated for their losses. Yesterday -- and I want to repeat it -- the Premier indicated that if government negligence is determined, then the government will pay. To the Premier: will the province pay all or only part of the investors' losses over what they will retrieve from the dissolution of Principal's assets?

MR. SPEAKER: That question is clearly out of order, and since the main question is out of order, it puts in danger the whole matter of the next process. But we will entertain the next supplementary. If this one is out of order, then the whole series of questions will fail.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, that would be the first time you've ruled an entire set of questions out of order, and I think that these questions at least should be ...

MR. SPEAKER: This is not a challenge of the Chair, hon. member. It's a warning to the member to be careful with the crafting of the phrases. Now please, the supplementary.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm seeking clarification of government policy on the determination of negligence. First supplementary, second question: will the Code inquiry or the Ombudsman have to state explicitly that the government was negligent before the government will accept that it was negligent?

MR. GETTY: It's completely hypothetical, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: It's hardly hypothetical. If you've already determined to pay it if it happens, it's not hypothetical. You have a policy. Do, therefore, these inquiries have the authority to state that explicitly, or does this mean that it will be the government's discretionary decision to determine its own

negligence, based on how it assesses any facts that come out of the inquiries?

MR. SPEAKER: This one is out of order because it's inquiring as to a legal opinion of the document. Final supplementary.

MR. MITCHELL: Finally, in light of this discussion of negligence, does the Premier not consider that the way his government frittered away \$125 million ...

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair hesitates ... [interjection] Order please. Order. There's a difficulty about the use of the word which the hon. member used, because there is no proof of any negligence. Therefore, an examination of the Blues will mean that you'll have to be a bit more careful in phrasing the question. Let's carry on with this final supplementary.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. Does the Premier not consider that if his government's action on June 30 resulted in the frittering away of maybe \$125 million of value in mutual funds and value in the trust company and value elsewhere in that firm, which could have been retrieved on public markets and taken to support the losses in First and Associated -- if that is determined to be the case, will the government accept that that was negligent, the way in which they put those companies down?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I would try to answer, but he is dealing in hypothetical cases. Now, the government doesn't like to throw aspersions around as much as some of the hon. members do, but it surely will be thought about, about the negligence of those who worked there.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in *Hansard* the Premier indicated clearly that

the investigations by the Ombudsman and by Mr. Code will be able to give ... indications of the government's regulatory process ...

My question, in view of the fact that the Premier said that: how can the Code inquiry determine negligence on the part of the government when that is not even part of their mandate?

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. Premier. First we have to have the consent of the House. Time for question period has expired. May we have unanimous consent to finish this line of questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.
Hon. Premier.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, I believe that there are now in place two investigations that are going to do the full job in bringing out all the details of the entire Principal affair. Then we are going to have in front of all the people of Alberta every single thing about it. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: I'm hearing some strange words in my left ear.

The point of order during question period, Premier? There's

no other point of order declared at this stage, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but the Chair recognizes the Premier on a point of order during discussion with the question from Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, it was the hon. member raising the point that somehow the Premier had goosed the investors, when I think it was so deliberately incorrect, and I wanted an opportunity to ask him to deal with his questions in a more appropriate way in this House, although he may not want to, and make it clear that people understand that the government feels a great deal of sympathy for the investors and is doing everything possible to help them.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on this particular point of order?

MR. WRIGHT: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, then I will recognize you immediately after the Chair recognizes Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Am I allowed to speak on the point of order, Mr. Speaker? I don't think there's any question in the vernacular of the term -- the Premier was talking about the English language a while back. There's no question that these investors have been goosed. The whole idea is that we're trying to determine by who. He says that the government is holding two investigations. One of them is in secret. So there's no question that they've suffered, they've lost. I don't know what he uses the word "goose" for, but that's what I consider goose. You lose your money on a government-licensed debenture.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. Does the Chair understand that the member wishes to withdraw his statement? If not, perhaps then the Chair will make another ruling in a moment.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to withdraw it. That was only a point of order to try to explain it to him in simple English, barrack-room English or locker-room English, what he has done to the investors in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. The matter would call for a review of the Blues, and perhaps the members will be able to deal with it on another occasion.

The Chair recognizes now Edmonton-Strathcona on a point of order.

MR. WRIGHT: On the point of order raised earlier by the Leader of the Opposition and explained by you, Mr. Speaker, on the basis of 23(g)(i) as I heard it, which is the sub judice matter, I realize that on the ruling you made yesterday, the matter if you say it is to do with the Code inquiry impinging on that matter, is one which falls within the ambit of the rule. But I just wish to draw respectfully to your attention. Mr. Speaker, that one must then go on and see, having decided that it falls within the ambit of the rule, who is prejudiced, whether any person may be prejudiced. The question that you made the ruling on, Mr. Speaker, concerned the question of what would constitute negligence. It's difficult indeed, I submit, to find anybody that would be prejudiced by that, other than the government itself possibly. But it's the government . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. A due and appropriate review of the Blues will take place in due course. Nevertheless, there was a ruling of the Chair. What the member is currently doing is actually appealing the Speaker's ruling. There is an appropriate manner in which to do this, and I look forward to a substantive motion if that is what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wishes to do.

The Chair would also parenthetically like to point out that it's usual for the member who is directly aggrieved to raise the point of order himself rather than . . . [interjection] It is the usual procedure; it is not clad in iron. I just point it out.

MR. WRIGHT: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order . . .

MR. SPEAKER: I'm sorry; is this a new point of order?

MR. WRIGHT: It is . . .

MR. SPEAKER: There's no further discussion on this particular point of order. Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: Only to say, Mr. Speaker, that you've . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Order. [interjections] Pardon me, Leader of the Opposition?

MR. MARTIN: I'm not talking to you; I'm talking to the Premier.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Orders of the Day.

MR. MITCHELL: On a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: What is this particular point of order?

MR. MITCHELL: This concerns the grounds under which three of my four questions were ruled out of order, Mr. Speaker . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: He doesn't like you.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm getting that impression, actually.

I believe there were two possibilities in the discussion which ensued. The various . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. We're in the same difficulty as with respect to Edmonton-Strathcona's challenge to the Chair. Perhaps we could meet privately at the conclusion of the day. The same offer is applied to all members of the House, including the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona as well as the Leader of the Opposition. Orders of the Day have been called.

MR. MITCHELL: I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WRIGHT: I have a point of order. Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has recognized Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker. This is the first time in my experience that we haven't been able to make our

case on a point of order following question period. I respect the fact that you would like to meet with me personally. I would be pleased to do that to discuss your ruling, but I believe I should be able to make the case about that ruling now, and I would appreciate the opportunity to do that. It is critical that this kind of discussion be in public and in the open so that we can, as much as possible, create an environment within which we can discuss this important issue. I would like to make the case, therefore, at this time. Thank you.

It seems to me that there are . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The member has not been recognized to carry on. The matter is [inaudible] a motion for an appeal to the Chair. Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. CHUMIR: It's on the general difficulty which we are encountering in this matter, Mr. Speaker, and with respect to the need to develop a process to handle this issue more effectively. The concern I have is that we in the opposition are placed in a position of Russian roulette, and that if we raise an issue that is in any way related to this particular problem, we run the risk of being called out of order and losing our question. Now, I understand that that has been the practice of this House, but we are here dealing with a very unusually difficult situation in which I believe every effort should be made to expand the opportunities for discussion and questioning rather than to narrow them.

Now, I would respectfully request, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps you might give consideration to some process whereby in the event a decision is reserved as to whether or not a question is or is not out of order, the questioner be given an opportunity to ask another question. Now, perhaps it would have to be on another topic; it could be very complex. But it seems to me that it's in the interests of fairness in broadening questioning that such a process be thought through, and we've only scratched the surface in terms of the complexity of this issue.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair doesn't disagree with the concern of the member in probably expressing the concerns of the House. I think that on the latter part of that discussion the Member for Calgary-Buffalo will note that there was indeed a considerable amount of latitude given to the line of questioning by Edmonton-Meadowlark, so that indeed all of the questions did eventually flow.

With respect to the process which we went through in great detail yesterday on at least two occasions, the matter was -- and more than ample notice was given to the House -- that we would have to reserve on some of the areas. Indeed, that has been the case with respect to the leader of the Liberal caucus, and the member has kindly sent forward typed versions of the questions so that we have had at least receipt of them, and indeed so that they can be studied before tomorrow's question period and then brought back for the leader of the caucus to still present towards the House tomorrow, those that are indeed in order.

Now, members will recall that the Chair also suggested that there was the other form of dealing with questions, and the Chair used that as a potential bridging device so that indeed questions that are in order could be asked, and that was to submit them in written form for the Order Paper. The Chair appreciates that numbers of individuals in the House will be frustrated by that process. That's one of two ways that we can attempt to guarantee what is indeed a fair question to the House, one that is admissible and indeed one that is not going to prejudice the

cases and the inquiries. What we have gone through today is a variation on that theme, which is that some will be ruled out of order, as some were yesterday, and some will be asked to be delivered in this form so that the House can deal with them at the earliest possible opportunity, which is indeed to the advantage of members wishing to ask the questions as opposed to the process of submitting them just to go onto the Order Paper in written form exclusively.

So the Chair feels that that's the only latitude that can be enjoyed in terms of this matter, and the Chair will not reiterate all the difficulties of sub judice rule. But the Chair has listened, and indeed we will deal with the matters as raised by the leader of the Liberal caucus at the earliest possible moment. And hopefully this might be a way to try to speed up the process so that if a question doesn't get in on one day, hopefully it will be there by the next day.

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if it would be possible to develop an intermediate process in which, instead of submitting written questions for the Order Paper, we were able to discuss questions in advance with yourself. One of the difficulties I believe we are having in the opposition is that there seems to be no rhyme or reason as to when a question is or is not called in or out of . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, order. Reflections upon the Chair. If you want to speak with me individually and give all the reflections you want, that's one thing, but not in this Chamber.

The other thing that the Chair is willing to do at any time, and does indeed invite the House leaders of all of the political persuasions in the House, is to meet together and develop an alternative form. But the Chair believes that that is up to the House leaders, to develop that, to come forward, and then indeed the Chair is only too willing to go forward with whatever solution develops there.

The Chair recognizes Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: Mr. Speaker, my point of order is a simple one, being that it's a complete impasse if you may not discuss points of order as they arise in question time -- which is of course a sensible decision, to postpone it to the end of question time in the interests of not wasting time -- but yet when we attempt, as I did, to discuss the point of order at the conclusion of question time, it is regarded as a challenge to the Chair. I was certainly not making any challenge to the Chair; I was attempting to discuss the rule in a case, moreover, which is extremely pertinent to our deliberations not only today but in the succeeding days.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair appreciates -- on that particular comment I believe this is really a disagreement between the individual member and the Chair.

Calgary-Buffalo for the succinct.

MR. CHUMIR: On this same issue, Mr. Speaker, because when I noted that there seems to be no rhyme or reason, it was not a matter of challenge; it was merely a statement that there is no objective indication from Mr. Speaker as to why one question is in order and another question is not. That is exactly the point that Edmonton-Strathcona is making here.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Please take your seat. I'm not really gaining any additional information on this at this stage.

We can deal with this elsewhere.

Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the Chair would like to point out that as has been the practice of the House, the points of order will indeed be taken at the end of question period. The lack of mutual understanding on this particular issue is with respect to the request of the Leader of the Opposition for the Chair to indeed state the Standing Order under which the Chair had made the ruling. That was done, communicated, sent also by note to the Leader of the Opposition as to what [inaudible]. That was much more of a technical ruling and therefore, in the opinion of the Chair, did not need to have to go through a kind of broader discussion. But please be reassured that matters of points of order that have the broader scope will indeed be handled in our normal practice at the end of question period; that will indeed continue.

The difficulty on the other issue as raised by Edmonton-Meadowlark was that once again we were back into this difficult, treacherous minefield of asking questions or answering questions with regard to a matter that is sub judice. And the line of questioning that was dealt with, no matter how poorly handled by the Chair, with respect to the line of questioning from Edmonton-Meadowlark, those decisions were made with respect to the sub judice convention. So they were two different issues. Please be reassured that points of order will still be raised at the end of question period.

MR. WRIGHT: [Inaudible] misunderstanding has been cleared up, Mr. Speaker. It is simply this: that not only must you find that the matter is within the ambit of the sub judice rule but someone is being prejudiced. I'm sure you have that in mind, Mr. Speaker, but it must be paid attention to on each occasion. And when the sort of question that the Leader of Opposition asked is asked, I submit there is no one that can be prejudiced except possibly the government, but that doesn't count because it's the government speaking.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair appreciates that. As pointed out yesterday, and as anyone who knows the Speaker individually knows fully, I am far from being perfect and I can't catch everything. So there'll be some times where indeed mea culpa, mea culpa.

Orders of the Day.

[Mr. Mitchell rose]

MR. SPEAKER: This is an Order of the Day?

MR. MITCHELL: I rise on a motion under Standing Order 40.

MR. SPEAKER: A motion under Standing Order 40, emergency debate?

MR. MITCHELL: That's right, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The topic, please.

MR. MITCHELL: My resolution addresses the matter of changing Standing Order 23 to alter the interpretation of sub judice, and to allow us a broader discussion within this Legislature without putting you in the kind of difficult ruling position that you've found yourself in. I would like to move that motion at this time.

MR. SPEAKER: It's that urgent?

MR. MITCHELL: It is urgent, and I have the opportunity to speak to that urgency. I'm entitled to that opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, just two points of friendly advice. First, the Chair would like to have a copy of the motion, and the member should not really start to engage in chit-chat with the rest of House starting to debate the issue until the Chair has at least had a chance to read the motion. Then perhaps we can see, and the motion in due course, under Standing Order 40, would be put to the House. Then one would wait to see whether unanimous consent is given before the debate takes place.

The Chair has reviewed the motion, and there is a slight editorial change that needs to be made within the body of the motion because of it being the Legislative Assembly making the decision. The Chair would then invite the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to read the motion -- no discussion with respect to the motion -- and then the question would be put to the House as to whether or not there's unanimous consent under Standing Order 40 to proceed. But first, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, read the motion.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, before I start, I wonder if I could just rise on a point of order under Standing Order 40. I appreciate your allowing me to proceed under Standing Order 40, but I also am entitled, as I read it.

A motion may, in the case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover . . .

So I do have a chance to speak to it under that, and I wonder if you might clarify that for me before I proceed.

MR. YOUNG: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, it is my interpretation of the rule that what must be explained, very briefly, is the "urgent and pressing necessity," not anything else.

MR. SPEAKER: Both members are indeed correct. Edmonton-Meadowlark, please read the motion that one would propose to the House.

MR. MITCHELL: Certainly, and the "very briefly," Mr. Speaker, is something that I would contest, but I won't carry on in any event. I rise, under Standing Order 40, to move the following motion, Mr. Speaker:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly amend Standing Order 23, section (g) subsection (i) to replace the words "pending" with "at trial" and revoke 23(g)(ii) altogether.

I distribute copies of the motion without having had the opportunity to amend each individual copy to remove the words "urge the government," but I would ask the hon. members to keep that in mind when they see this motion. Thank you very much.

I'll just take a moment to speak to the motion. Standing Order 23(g)(i), as it is presently written, precludes debate or questioning on any matter that is

pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination.

By changing this to read:

that is at trial in a court

and by revoking 23(g)(ii), which states:

that is before any quasi-judicial, administrative or investigative . . .

MR. YOUNG: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, a point of order.

MR. YOUNG: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the hon. member, having read his motion, should now speak to the urgent necessity, not to an explanation of the motion or a debate about the motion, but why it must be granted unanimous consent by all members and, in this particular instance, interfering with what other is scheduled today, which is the members' day.

MR. SPEAKER: If the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would indeed look at the first line of Standing Order 40 and refocus the comments to that matter of urgent and pressing necessity.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I'm merely trying to explain what it means, because the way the motion reads it's highly technical and its implications may not be clear. I couldn't imagine that any hon. member in this Legislature would want to vote on a motion that hadn't been explained to them and who couldn't possibly understand its implications. Or do you?

MR. SPEAKER: With due respect, the member could indeed presume that all members of the House are now thoroughly familiar with Standing Orders as to what is there and perhaps could now deal with the urgent and pressing necessity, please.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion deals with broadening the ability of this Legislature to discuss matters relating to Principal Group and the government's involvement with Principal Group. It's urgent because one of the clear sources of compensation for investors will be proven government negligence. The fact that compensation is urgent relates to the state or status in which investors in Principal Group currently find themselves.

MR. YOUNG: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Another point of order, hon. member.

MR. YOUNG: The hon. member, Mr. Speaker, I submit is dealing with what might be the outcome of a series of events if those events occurred. He is not addressing the urgency of debating the particular motion. The focus should be very narrowly on why this motion should be debated today as opposed to some other day. That is the ambit of the hon. member's remarks or what they should be, Mr. Speaker. I would request that if the hon. member cannot observe that, perhaps you might put to the House the question of whether the motion should be debated, and let's get on with the day.

MR. MITCHELL: It has to be debated today. It should have probably been debated yesterday. The fact of the matter is that it relates to a decision that this Legislature may or may not come to, a decision which will affect the lives of people involved in this matter. And if this government is going to hang itself, its position on some technical administrative matter, and not give me the possibility, just the common courtesy to make a case about its urgency, I find that to be . . .

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, on a point of privilege. If I'm being challenged, as Government House Leader, as not giving the hon. member a common courtesy, I think the hon. member

should reflect upon that, especially since he presumes to ask our unanimous consent for something which to this point he's not given any reason should be dealt with today as opposed to any other day.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the comment should indeed be directed to this matter. The matter that a point of order is being properly raised in terms of one's comments cannot be construed as carrying the meaning of the words which the member did indeed use. Just the urgency, one last time. Otherwise, the Chair will indeed call for the question.

MR. MITCHELL: This matter is urgent and must be discussed today rather than some other day, Mr. Speaker, because there is no other recourse for having this matter discussed. It is important that the Legislature be allowed to discuss the questions that we have been trying to raise and which, with due respect, you've had difficulty assessing because they are difficult to assess. We will be resolving that matter and providing for more informed debate in pursuit of this issue in the interests of many Albertans if we are able to change this particular Standing Order and allow this Legislature to ask questions about government involvement in the Principal Group affair.

Thank you very much. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Standing Orders says that only the mover may speak.

There has been a request under Standing Order 40, a request made by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, to receive unanimous consent to a motion to proceed with debate. All those in favour of giving unanimous consent, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The request fails.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

head: MOTIONS FOR RETURNS

210. Mrs. Hewes moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports submitted in 1985 by the steering committee created to review the administrative procedures of the Provincial Laboratory of Public Health.

MR. YOUNG: My apologies to the House, Mr. Speaker. I believe I should have moved that motions 210 and 216, I believe they are, should stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the member willing to . . .

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, does this require that we vote on whether or not they can be dealt with now?

MR. SPEAKER: The difficulty, members of the House, is that because of the lack of communication, the normal motion to have the matter stay on the Order Paper was not put at the regular time. So in the meantime, the Member for Edmonton-Gold

Bar, having been invited to do so, then made a motion.

Therefore, I suppose that the process is for the Chair to see whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would be gracious enough to request leave to withdraw her motion, and then we would need unanimous consent of the House to have that motion withdrawn at this time.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, as a result of the hon. House leader's comments, I'll be pleased to withdraw the motion with the understanding that it does come forward at the earliest. It's a matter of importance and was left since the spring.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair thanks the member for that gracious action. Is there unanimous consent of the House to withdraw the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
Motion, Government House Leader.

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, again with apologies and also with thanks to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I would move that motions 210 and 216 stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

head: **MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

221. Moved by Mr. Wright:

Be it resolved that the *Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta* be amended as follows:

- A Standing Order 80 is amended by inserting the words "Except as provided in Standing Order 83.1," at the beginning of it.
- B The following is added after Standing Order 83:
"83.1 A petition which purports to be signed by
 - (a) 3 percent of the persons entitled to vote in a general election in the province in the case of a petition which does not pray for any expenditure, grant, or charge on the public revenue, or
 - (b) 5 percent of the persons entitled to vote in a general election in the province in the case of a petition which prays for an expenditure, grant, or charge on the public revenue,

shall, upon being presented by a member in the Assembly, automatically stand referred to the Chief Electoral Officer, who shall determine whether or not the petition complies with clauses (a) or (b) by counting the signatures and by verifying such proportion of them as is in his opinion reasonable and shall report his findings to the Assembly with all practicable speed.

83.2(1) Within 10 sitting days of the receipt by the Assembly of a report from the Chief Electoral Officer certifying that a petition referred to him pursuant to Standing Order 83.1 complies with Standing Order 83.1(a) or (b), the Assembly shall debate a motion on the question in suborder (5).

(2) Not less than three hours shall be set aside for consideration of the petition's prayer and no motion to adjourn the debate shall be considered by the Assembly

until such time as the three hours has elapsed, save at the normal adjournment hour or by unanimous consent.

(3) The time set aside for consideration of the motion shall be set by the Government House Leader and shall be during time otherwise reserved for consideration of government business.

(4) No other matter or item of government business shall be considered by the Assembly until such time as the motion has been considered and decided upon by the Assembly.

(5) At the conclusion of consideration of the motion, the Speaker shall put the following question:

"Shall the petition's prayer be accepted and referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations?"

(6) If the motion is passed, the petition's prayer shall automatically stand referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

83.3(1) When a petition is referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations pursuant to Standing Order 83.2, the committee shall, within 15 sitting days of the referral, report back to the Assembly.

(2) The committee's report shall be in the form of either a draft for a Bill or a motion which, if adopted by the Assembly, would give effect to the petition's prayers.

83.4(1) If a Bill prepared by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations pursuant to Standing Order 83.3 contains a provision for an expenditure, grant, or charge on the public revenue, then a member of the Executive Council designated for this purpose by the Executive Council shall seek the recommendation of the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for the Bill, and thereafter that member of the Executive Council shall act as the sponsor of the Bill in the Assembly, if the recommendation is made.

(2) If a Bill or motion prepared by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations pursuant to Standing Order 83.3 does not contain a provision for an expenditure, grant, or charge on the public revenue, then the member who presented the petition shall act as the sponsor for the Bill or motion in the Assembly.

(3) A Bill or motion brought forward pursuant to this standing order shall be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills or Government Motions, as the case may be.

83.5 If the Legislative Assembly is prorogued or dissolved before all matters brought before it pursuant to standing orders 83.2 and 83.4 are resolved, then those matters shall be placed on the Order Paper for the next session of the Legislature in the form in which they had been left and at the stage in which they had been left at the time of prorogation or dissolution.

83.6 No vote taken in the Assembly pursuant to standing orders 83.2 and 83.4 shall be deemed to involve a question of the confidence of the Assembly in the government or a minister.

MR. WRIGHT: Mr. Speaker, this is a motion that seeks to amend the Standing Orders of this Assembly in order to make our Assembly more responsive to the needs of the people. Petitions are a fundamental part of the parliamentary procedure in theory, but in practice they amount to no more than demonstra-

tions, as a rule. In fact, as recently as June 1985, a report of the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons noted:

the right to petition Parliament is a fundamental right of the citizen and ... petitions are an integral part of the process whereby the people of Canada speak to their elected representatives.

Yet we know the fate of petitions that reach this House. Mr. Speaker. They make a point, but that's about it. They do not get taken up by the Assembly, as a matter of fact.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

This amendment to Standing Orders, if approved by the Assembly -- and I hope, for the reasons I've just stated, that the Assembly will approve them -- will alter that because it will provide that if there is a petition signed by 3 percent of the people entitled to vote in a general election. 5 percent in the case of a matter that requires the expenditure of public money, then:

upon being presented by a member in the Assembly, [the petition shall] automatically stand referred to the Chief Electoral Officer, who shall determine whether or not the petition complies with ...

the 3 percent or 5 percent, as the case may be.

Then, if the answer is yes,

the Assembly shall debate a motion on the question ...

and:

Not less than three hours shall be set aside for consideration of the petition's prayer and no motion to adjourn the debate shall be considered by the Assembly until such time as the three hours has elapsed, save at the normal adjournment hour or by unanimous consent.

And moreover:

The time set aside for consideration of the motion shall be set by the Government House Leader and shall be during time otherwise reserved for consideration of government business.

No other matter or item of government business shall be considered by the Assembly until such time as the motion has been considered and decided upon ...

At the conclusion of the debate, the question shall be put, under our proposed amendment, Mr. Speaker:

"Shall the petition's prayer be accepted and referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations?"

If the motion is passed, then the standing committee has to frame the necessary remedy prayed for in the petition, and it reports back to the Assembly

in the form of either a draft for a Bill or a [draft] motion which, if adopted by the Assembly, would give effect to the petition's prayers.

Additional provisions are there in the case that what is dealt with is a request for, in effect, the expenditure of money, so that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, upon the advice of the Executive Council, can make the necessary recommendation. Then when it comes back to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, the member who presented the petition will act as sponsor.

There are two important further provisions. The first is that if prorogation or dissolution of the Assembly occurs before the matter has been completely dealt with, it will automatically come back on the Order Paper of the next session of the Legislature

in the form in which [it] had been left and at the stage in which [it] had been left at the time of prorogation or dissolution.

Secondly, and this is very important, Mr. Speaker:

No vote taken in the Assembly pursuant [to this order] shall be deemed to involve a question of the confidence of the Assembly in the Government or a Minister.

So that even though the government of the day may have serious

doubts on the question and may urge the Assembly to vote against it, if the matter carries, it cannot involve the loss of office by the government.

We do tend to think, Mr. Speaker, that the loss of a motion by the government involves in some way necessarily loss of confidence in the government. That is often not so in other Legislatures where coalitions are common. But even in our own first past the post type of electoral system giving the Legislatures that we do have, it is not remarked upon very often how many such votes there are which are deemed not to be matters of confidence. Between April 1972 and April 1979 there were 65 votes in the British House of Commons lost by the government, and none was deemed to constitute a matter of confidence. The minority Liberal Canadian government between 1972 and 1974 lost eight of 81 recorded votes, and only the last was deemed to be a matter of confidence and thus to occasion the fall of the government.

So that is another thing we should adjust our ideas about. There is no doubt that people in the province, ordinary people, think the Legislature is remote, that they don't have much chance of affecting what we do except in a very blunt and wholesale way, by voting out the government at election time. This is a more skillful and subtler way of dealing with the question. It does not, to anticipate a counterargument, Mr. Speaker, encroach in any way upon the parliamentary system. Rather, it strengthens the parliamentary system because, as I have made clear by my quotation, procedure by petition is a fundamental instrument of our system. What would be wrong, and what this procedure guards against, is the full initiative by petition, which we are familiar with from some of the United States, particularly California, where not only must a petition which commands a certain percentage of the voters be put on the ballot, but the results of the ballot are the same as a Bill passed in the Legislature of the state.

This is not the case here. Our system is preserved in that we have control of it in the Assembly, but the system is made more flexible and responsive by the requirement that those considerable percentages having been achieved, at least we as an Assembly have to debate it for a reasonable length of time and show our colours, as it were, to the people so that they will understand, even in the case where their petition fails, the reasons why it fails and will be able, in a proper case, to hold those responsible who incur their displeasure.

So I submit with respect, Mr. Speaker, that this is something we should approach in a nonpolitical way, a nondenominational way, and consider on its merits, because it is good for the process. It is not something that says that Conservatives are mistaken or that New Democrats are right or which comes down on one side of the political spectrum or another. It is simply a procedural device which will, we believe, help the democratic process in the province. It was part of our election promise at the last election, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in the places where it was discussed in that campaign, it was very well received by the people to whom we were talking.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that the effectiveness of individual members of the Legislative Assembly and the ability of individual Albertans, either directly or through their elected members, to affect the course of public policy will be enhanced by this measure. I commend it to the Assembly.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for

me to be able to rise at this time and to address Motion 221. I want to begin by thanking the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing this motion forward at this time. I know that he certainly means well by it and that the intentions behind the motion are for meaningful change to the parliamentary process. I think all of us here this afternoon would certainly support and are receptive to ways of improving the parliamentary process.

Essentially, as I understand Motion 221, if passed it would require petitions receiving signatures of 3 percent of eligible voters or 5 percent of eligible voters in the case of money petitions to be debated by this Assembly. It's of interest to note, Mr. Speaker, that none of the petitions presented to this Assembly in the last four years would have had enough signatures required to fulfill this particular proposed motion.

That aside, Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my comments today from the perspective of parliamentary practice and convention. In reviewing Motion 221, I found many of its provisions to be at odds with parliamentary practice and convention and noted that it would also create a number of inconsistencies and contradictions to our Standing Orders. I noted that proposed Standing Order 83.2(2) disregards custom concerning motions to adjourn. According to this provision, adjournment of debate could only be considered at the normal adjournment time after the House has sat for three hours or by unanimous consent. Yet *Beauchesne*, citation 293(1), makes it clear that a motion to adjourn the House is always in order. Proposed Standing Order 83.2(4) calls for a delay of government business provision, and this is obviously redundant. Whenever there is a motion in front of the House, the House cannot have any other business before it. Proposed Standing Order 83.5 dictates that the Bills or motions on petition be unaffected by prorogation or dissolution. This provision would exempt petitions from the normal effect of prorogation or dissolution and, of course, doesn't conform to normal practice of the Assembly.

Proposed Standing Order 83.6 advocates that defeat for a petition Bill or motion would not be a nonconfidence vote, and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona addressed that. But again, this provision states that government-adopted Bills or motions on petitions, even if concerning financial measures, would not involve a question of the confidence of the House, and again, Mr. Speaker, this is clearly at odds with long-standing parliamentary tradition, where if a financial measure is defeated, the government is deemed to have lost the confidence of the House and must resign. I would suggest that we would really be in for a parliamentary crisis if this were allowed to stand.

So there are a number of inconsistencies and contradictions there, Mr. Speaker. But parliamentary practice and convention aside, what this motion is really leading us to is government by petition. I'm sorry, but I do not believe it to be either appropriate or desirable for petitions to establish the agenda of this Assembly. That's what we elect governments for. I'm prepared, as one member in this Assembly, to accept that responsibility and to participate in the establishment of our agenda and from time to time to go to the voters, to go to all Albertans on a regular basis at election time and have them evaluate whether our priorities were appropriate or not. Of course, we witnessed that last night in Chinook and I think received an overwhelming vote of confidence in that instance.

Mr. Speaker, not to be misunderstood, I believe there is a role for petitions. In fact, I think petitions are a terrific way of communicating to government. They are a tremendous tool for

sending a message to government, and I certainly encourage some of my own constituents who have been inclined in that direction to follow through with their efforts on petitions. But I also recognize that petitions are sometimes very self-serving. They can represent a very biased perspective, a very narrow viewpoint. Often they represent only special interest groups. They can be very emotional at times and often do not take into consideration the overall perspective necessary for making sound and good judgment decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I took the time to look down the list of the 21 petitions that have been presented to the Legislature during the last four years. I think it would be fair to say that all of them fall into at least one of the categories I have just described. A perfect example I did come across was a petition brought forward by the leader of the NDPs, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, back on March 20, 1984. I noted that his major contributions at that time were two petitions signed by 8,540 and 2,665 people respectively, and his concern of the day was to extend the hours of operation of two ALCB liquor stores in Edmonton. Again, a very emotional issue -- I suppose self-serving perhaps. Not that I'm suggesting by any means that it's self-serving for the Leader of the Opposition, but self-serving certainly for the people that signed the petition, a very biased perspective in a very focused matter. Again, it's interesting to note that the Member for Edmonton-Norwood would place such importance on the extension of liquor store hours.

Mr. Speaker, petitions are only one way for the government to receive feedback, and as I said earlier, they are terrific ways of communicating to government. But so is writing to your M.L.A. or taking the time to phone your M.L.A. or making the effort to attend a storefront government or a town hall meeting, which I know a lot of the members here participate in. These are all effective means of getting helpful feedback to the M.L.A. And let's face it; I think all of us here this afternoon, it's fair to say, appreciate that kind of feedback and recognize we need that kind of feedback to provide good, sound government.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that for me, personally, 10 or 20 hand-written letters mean a lot more than a petition with 100 or even 1,000 names. Again, not to downplay the importance or effectiveness of petitions, as politicians we have to evaluate the process used for gathering these petitions. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that during my 11-plus years on Red Deer city council I saw a good number of petitions. It was always interesting for me to first of all sit down and review the petitions that were received on a particular issue, both pro and con. Coming from a smaller community, the first thing I would do is run down both petitions to see how many people had signed both pro and con, and many did. Not to be critical of them, Mr. Speaker, for it's the process. The process itself invites those types of irregularities.

All we have to do is evaluate how petitions are raised. They're raised by neighbours -- persistent neighbours -- friends, special interest groups, and sometimes it's more convenient to sign them than to argue or debate the issue. Or sometimes it's someone at your door while supper is burning or the sudden-death goal is just being scored in overtime, or it's a professional lobbyist. And I certainly wouldn't recommend that, Mr. Speaker. If this motion were passed, there's no question that we would see more and more of that as well, even in a smaller community like Red Deer.

I've witnessed at least one occasion where a full-time professional lobbyist was brought in. I witnessed a situation where community groups were being exploited and young children

were being paid 25 cents for every name they raised for that particular petition. Now, I know that the money collected had to be used by that particular group or organization the children were representing and, in most instances, the money did end up going to good causes, but what a way to raise money; what a way to raise a petition. People were more interested in signing so kids could go to camp or play hockey or whatever the cause of the day happened to be. Again, Mr. Speaker, I can see more and more of this if we were to allow a motion like this to pass and we would see clearly a shift to government by petition. I ask: is that what we want for Alberta? Is that what we want for Albertans?

I'm certainly prepared to look at petitions, assess them, and weigh them into the decision-making process, but I'm not prepared to abdicate my responsibilities as an elected representative. That is to say again, Mr. Speaker, that the responsibility for setting the agenda of this Legislative Assembly has to lie in the hands of the duly elected government and not in the hands of lobbyists and self-serving interest groups. If we allow this motion to pass and we allow petitions to establish our agenda, then I regret to say that the next logical progression from there is going to be government by plebiscite, the American situation. Is that what we want for Albertans? A situation of yes to proposition 59 or no to proposition 32 or maybe to proposition 16?

I know that I had the opportunity of being in Houston during one of the presidential elections, and when the voters were going to the polls that night in Houston, they had an agenda of some 55 items to vote on. And I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but that's just not an effective way of running government. Fifty-five items; there is just absolutely no way the voter has the opportunity of being well informed on all the issues surrounding those 55 decisions. Really, what we start to see then is a situation where people are voting on campaigns, not on real issues but campaigns. Campaigns will determine the outcome of the issues, and I don't think that's what we want to see here in Alberta either.

Again, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing this motion forward. I know that he means well by it and that he is very sincere about trying to strive for parliamentary reform. But I would want to conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that if parliamentary reform is the motivation for this motion, there are other aspects of parliamentary democracy which could be looked at for more effective reform or for getting to the heart of the problem instead of trying to rearrange the Standing Orders. I would certainly encourage the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, particularly with his legal background, to pursue that. But I cannot support Motion 221. I cannot support the concept of government by petition. I would want to conclude by saying that the laws of this province should be made in the Legislative Assembly and not in the streets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity of being able to participate in the discussion this afternoon. I look forward to hearing from further members.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I believe the hon. leader of the Liberal Party caught the Chair's eye.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In rising for my first debate this fall, I note that things haven't changed too much. The genial member for Red Deer-South is always given the unpleasant task by the government to try to kill anything that looks progressive and forward looking. He seems to

be the token representative of the 19th century over on that side. I suppose there is some need to have those views recorded in the history books, and consequently I must compliment him on having the perseverance one would only expect in a Liberal in this province.

In rising to support the member on the question of petitions, I would like to add our party's support to the idea. I would like to also ask the members to think about it in a more nonpartisan nature, because actually we're talking of 3 to 5 percent of the eligible voters. I don't have my math computer with me, but I think that's 30,000 to 50,000 signatures. That's a lot of signatures even if somebody goes around and gives the kids each a revel or two bits -- as our Member for Red Deer-South said could happen -- and consequently just defeats the whole idea of democracy in the province. Someone coming in with a carload of revels and giving them out to the students of this province would immediately somehow or other scupper the parliamentary thought or parliamentary action. It seems a little hard to follow.

I think there's no question, Mr. Speaker, when we analyze some of the moves by the new parties that spring up, be they on the extreme right, the extreme left, or in the middle -- it doesn't matter -- one of the platforms they nearly always seem to have is recall or petitions or something along that nature. Obviously, there's a feeling by many people that they are fed up with the old-line parties, if you want to call it -- and now you can put the NDP in with us on that -- that somehow or another they do not get their will to the public or at least their will doesn't get debated. I think we're all guilty of that. All three political parties seem to talk about having participatory democracy, but when we get in, somehow or another it becomes just a little too embarrassing to practise.

I think this particular motion is a very nice way of slightly opening the door. There's nothing binding about it. All it says is that the issue would have to come up for debate. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has even gone so far as to except any decision coming from that debate as being binding or considered a vote of confidence. I don't know how you can make it much less threatening to the government of the day than the way he has set out his petition. I compliment him for it.

I don't think there's any question that if you observe our society today -- and maybe it's the medium of television or whatever it is, whether it's question period or whether it's the fact the parliamentary debates are being televised much more or whether we as MLAs or MPs are getting into the living rooms of the nation much more than we did in the past -- I think a great deal of the public wants to have a feeling that they have some part in the democratic process so they can do something. Somehow they can move that behemoth or that almost immovable object they think of as Parliament or the Legislature. Somehow or another they can put a Utile pinprick of conscience or a little bit of discomfort to make us talk about what is occupying their minds.

I know even in my own work in my own party I have taken the lead in trying to throw the leadership of the party open to all the members that hold a membership rather than a select few or a select few of our delegates. As a matter of fact, it's a policy that our group worked out so well that the Conservative Party of Ontario has written me and asked to see if they could get the details and use that somehow or another, because they've seen the astounding success that we are moving back out here and think maybe they can use some sort of breath of oxygen too to reactivate that rather recent corpse in the political scene of Canada. So I've been quite glad to send that down to them, and I think you will find there are many other political parties that

will be thinking the same way. The Americans did it some years ago. They went out of the idea that somebody selected a delegate who in turn selected someone else who in turn went out and got a Premier. They opened it up so the whole democratic process was open to anyone that wanted to come out and join their party. I wish the Conservative Party every success in Ontario in trying that idea, knowing full well that as long as Ottawa stays in the hands of that great Irish tenor, they will have little success indeed anyhow. Nevertheless, the idea of opening up parties, being able to move Legislatures has become very much the in thing.

Maybe it's because we have our Charter of Rights. One thing I think I've sensed -- and I've been in politics maybe a lot longer than some people -- is, and I attribute it to bringing back our Constitution to Canada and with it enshrining a Charter of Rights, that the general public today has the feeling now that they want their will, their thoughts, to take precedence over the government's will, and more than that, not government's will, the House of Commons' will or the Legislature's will. I think that's something that's come about that we, particularly those that worship or think highly of the British parliamentary system where our rights are enshrined in precedents rather than in a Charter of Rights, are coming to accept. Putting the Charter of Rights into our Constitution means that the rights of the individual are paramount over the rights of the state. Of course, that's one of the large criticisms many people have regardless of what political faith they are, if they are interested in the doctrine of individual rights and freedom of rights, in questioning the Meech Lake accord.

But to get back into this issue of supporting the petition idea, I really can't understand why we would be afraid. I think we of all parties would bring a great deal of goodwill to ourselves if we somehow or another telegraphed to the people of Alberta that if, in spite of our wisdom here, divided up into three or four or five parties in the House, we missed a major item that should be debated, they could circulate a petition that would make sure the issue would get debated.

I see no danger whatsoever to the idea of a majority democracy when, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, it would not be an issue of whether a government would rise or fall if the debate went ahead. Yet I think it would send that semaphore, that signal, out to the public of Alberta that we as a House, involved as we are -- I'm sure, as anybody who listened today to all the hairsplitting and rulings that were going on in the different debates, we get a little tired of it. They could think that whatever they thought was very, very important, and if they could get enough signatures on it -- and holy smoke; 30,000 to 50,000 signatures is a lot of signatures -- it would at least come before the House to be debated in a nonconfrontational manner. Or at least, if it comes up in a confrontational manner, the fact that the decision from the debate would not be binding on the government of the day.

So I have no hesitation, Mr. Speaker, in expressing my support for this enlightened legislation, and I want to compliment the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing it forward. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. STEWART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against the amendments to the Standing Orders concerning the petitions that Motion 221 proposes. I'd like to divide my com-

ments into two categories: firstly, to deal with the changes and to indicate why I feel they are inappropriate in a practical sense and, secondly, to look at them from the standpoint of some of the ramifications or consequences that could arise, indeed, if this procedure were adopted.

At the outset may I say that I'm certainly not opposed to parliamentary reform which is meaningful and which has the potential to make the government more responsible to the wishes of the electorate that it serves. However, upon reflection on the amendments offered by this motion before us today, I am certainly not convinced, certainly in practical terms, that any significant change would result in the manner in which we deal with those petitions, particularly because the minimum number of signatories required to trigger a different treatment is far beyond the experience of this Assembly and probably beyond the experience that might be reasonably anticipated.

Public petitions addressed to the Legislative Assembly constitute one of the most direct means of communication between the people themselves and the Legislature. It is, of course, by this means that the people can voice their concerns to the House on matters of public interest. I believe that the right to petition government is indeed fundamental, as has been expressed by other hon. members, and that petitions are an integral part of the process whereby Albertans can speak to their elected representatives. All citizens and groups should have equal access to the Legislature, and their petitions should be attributed equal consideration. With this in mind, there may very well be some procedural revisions that would make the present Standing Orders less restrictive, that could be considered in order to make the process of petitioning more meaningful.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I don't think these proposed changes before us today will accomplish that, and I think it must be recognized that this motion creates, in effect, two or even perhaps three classes of petitions. Petitions presented to the Assembly would therefore no longer be accorded equal treatment. Some would simply be presented and received by the Assembly the way they are now. Some would be entitled to be debated as government business. Some would be debated and contain provisions to authorize expenditure of public funds. It seems to me that this would derogate from the principle of equality to which I have referred.

If parliamentary reform is the motivation for the motion, there are certainly other aspects of Standing Orders which could be examined for more effective reform, rather than trying to rearrange the Standing Orders in the manner suggested. For example, some Legislatures do allow a limited discussion on petitions; some do provide for reference of petitions to a committee for review; and indeed, some do require a formal response from the minister concerned. These are the kinds of amendments to Alberta's Standing Orders concerning petitions which might be meaningful and perhaps prompt government to take even greater note of the content of petitions and respond to them in a more direct manner. If the proposed amendments in Motion 221 were along those lines, I would consider that they would be worthy of our support for a direction of that nature. Unfortunately, I don't think they do.

The requirements of the motion dictate that if 3 percent of the eligible voters in Alberta sign a petition and 5 percent sign in the case of a petition that prays for an expenditure of government funds, that petition would then be placed on the government Order Paper as government business, be debated in the Assembly for not less than three hours, perhaps be referred to a Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, and perhaps be

adopted by Executive Council if the petition prays for an expenditure of public funds. In a nutshell, the motion not only proposes amendments to Standing Orders concerning petitions, I believe that it completely redefines government and nongovernment business. And in our parliamentary system that would be unheard of, and indeed it changes our parliamentary system as we know it.

If the intent is to force the Legislature to pay more attention to the customary petitions, then I would suggest that it's ineffectual. As a matter of fact, the motion does not at all amend the current method of dealing with petitions that are presented to the Assembly, because it's doubtful that any of them could meet the signatory requirements in order to trigger the additional provisions that are now brought forward by this motion.

It is not possible to defend amending the Standing Orders, and at the same time perhaps complicating them, which this motion certainly does, all to accommodate petitions that are not even likely to receive such unrealistic minimum numbers of signatories. By its very provisions the motion limits itself to the coming into effect only upon those unique circumstances. The chances of the amendments, therefore, ever being required are slim. The total number of eligible voters in the last election was 1,514,182. Simple calculation shows us that nonmoney petitions would need 45,500 signatures, and money petitions would need 75,700 signatures in order for this motion's proposals to even come into effect. These are very unrealistic figures to expect on any petition.

As has been indicated earlier, in the last four years 21 petitions have been read and received in this Assembly. I think it's noteworthy that none of these petitions would have met the requirements of this motion. In fact, not one of them even came close to having 45,500 signatures, let alone the 75,700. Therefore, while the sponsor may feel that he is improving the current practice, his amendments wouldn't even touch the existing practice in fact.

Even without this motion being in place, I think that if the subject of a petition were of such importance and general popularity that it received the required amount of signatures to trigger its effect, we can safely assume that the government would be aware of the issue and would be prepared to act upon it. I think the passage of the seat belt legislation was a good example in that case, where even before the Bill was presented to the House, a petition was placed out there with the people, and I believe they obtained 12,000 signatures with a goal of 25,000. But before the petition was even presented, the government did act. If the amendments had been in place, it's doubtful whether they would have even achieved the numbers that would have been necessary to give effect to these new amendments.

Something else that I believe has to be considered is that the present rules allow for all members to file a notice of motion for matters to be debated after they have been presented as a petition. With this avenue open to members any matter originally brought forward as a petition could be debated in the Assembly. There is no need for the proposed amendments to Standing Orders to bring important matters before the House. In addition, an issue could become a subject of discussion in the House through question period to a minister, or raised, of course, in the relevant committees of the House. For these reasons I think, Mr. Speaker, that the amendments are perhaps unnecessary.

However, more importantly, I think we should consider some of the ramifications which the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders could have if, in fact, a petition were to come forward in this manner. Consequences of reform cannot always

be predetermined with certainty. However, I do foresee some of the problems that could result if we did pass this motion. I believe there are important factors for us to consider during this debate, and I believe it is important to note that the motion, in effect, does alter the traditional parliamentary system where a general election determines a governing party and its policies as a particular framework for future direction. This motion certainly alters that basic and accepted parliamentary system in that regard and substitutes, in effect, as the hon. Member for Red Deer-South said, "government by petition."

In the 1986 provincial election the New Democrats received 208,561 votes. If one in four of these voters signed a petition organized by the NDs, that would be sufficient under the 3 percent rule for the petition to proceed, and under this motion it must supersede government business on the agenda. It would have guaranteed debate without the usual adjournment provisions. No government business could proceed at all until the petition is dealt with. It makes one wonder what the general action and the will of the majority was really all about. The decision of the majority of voters at the ballot box could be nullified through a petition from the minority.

It seems to me that this ignores the principles of democracy and representative government. It's conceivable that a particular region of the province or a lobby or pressure group, as indicated previously, could dictate what is debated in the House and what does become government business.

This motion would also allow petitions requesting expenditure of public moneys, and this is in contradiction to the existing Standing Order 80 which prohibits money petitions. This type of petition would in effect become a money Bill, and this would break with the parliamentary tradition by which the government has the sole prerogative for introducing such measures as raising revenues and allocating funding. It is accountable, of course, back to the Legislature and the people for that trust that it has been given.

Financial management by the government is done through the vehicle or instrument of a budget, which outlines the government's revenues and expenditure estimates. Probably no aspect of the government's business or work receives more thought and effort than the establishment and review of the government's spending strategy for the fiscal year.

Public expenditures through petition introduces a whole new element to this process. How could budgeting be accomplished with any certainty? Effective fiscal planning and administration could be seriously jeopardized and financial planning could, conceivably, become beyond control. In effect it would be possible for a budget to be presented by an opposition party and to be debated in priority to the majority government party's budget. Again, what is a general election all about?

Furthermore, under the motion's provisions, the government would be obliged to deal on a priority basis with a petition as a matter of policy, even if it was totally opposed to it. This would stand the whole normal course of government House business certainly on its head.

Motion 221 stipulates that the government-adopted Bills or motions on petitions, even money petitions, would not involve a question of the confidence of the House. This is in complete contradiction with the parliamentary tradition. If a government financial measure is defeated in the House, it's deemed to have lost the confidence of the House and must resign.

It's pretty clear that if a government is forced to introduce legislation that it is opposed to, then if they have the majority, they will defeat it. It seems to me that this is somewhat

ludicrous and leaves the door wide open for a parliamentary crisis of the nature that my hon. friend has mentioned. The only way to avoid this would be to prevent it from going to the select committee or defeating it in the committee stage. These methods would result in an indirect way to deal with matters that should be done directly and in the Legislature as a whole in this Assembly.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the matters raised by the petition would indeed have a preferential treatment far beyond any other business of the Assembly. In this way debate on the motion to refer the petition to the committee could not be adjourned at any time. Any other motion is subject to adjournment. Debate would have a minimum time period. No other motion has that privilege. Debate on the petition would have priority over all other matters in displacing the legitimate and important government business. The motion would carry over to a subsequent session. Other motions on the Order Paper, including government motions, would not; they would die. A petition requiring the expenditure of public funds would not constitute a question of confidence. On the other hand, government money Bills are subject to the question of confidence.

In short, I believe the whole tradition of the majority governing over a minority is cast aside, and the traditional and time-tested elements of our democratic parliamentary system are turned upside down. The very fact that the triggering mechanism for such extreme and convoluted provisions are set out far beyond practicality leads me to conclude that the motion and the changes proposed in the Standing Orders were not really intended to be anything other than a mere image of the democratic process. For these reasons I cannot support the motion, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of this motion. It is significant that this motion comes to the Assembly today, a day that I tabled a petition signed by 8,300 Albertans. This petition and this motion will in fact come up for debate because there was a member of the Legislature that was able to put it on the Order Paper. However, a couple of years ago over 8,000 students signed a similar petition and delivered it to this Assembly. It was never debated. It may be recognized that these students were not yet old enough to vote, but certainly they had a lesson in powerlessness and the fact that their wishes would not be consulted in this body.

During the election campaign and recent meetings that I've had with people throughout the province, I've heard a constant and recurring theme. People feel powerless, and they say there is no point in voting. They have not been consulted by government for solutions to their problems. They feel that politicians don't listen and that they don't care. They see the government, they say over and over again, as not responsible to them and indeed lump all politicians together in that category. They feel unconsulted. They feel unimportant, and they suffer from apathy.

We often hear about the apathetic citizenry. I would say it is a demoralized citizenry that feels their government does not listen to them. Too often they talk about solutions being imposed on them, solutions that have been reached in isolation from them, and they have no avenue of expressing their concerns. In the same way, we've heard and seen this year that petitions have been received in this Assembly in regard to community school

spending. There are petitions regarding the cuts in health care funding. There are a great number of motions on the Order Paper, and to suggest that we place a motion on the Order Paper in order to address these concerns doesn't weigh much with me because of the number of motions on the Order Paper; it takes a very long time to get through the list. So maybe in a couple of years we might be able to address those motions, going the way we have.

These motions that people need address many issues, and we need to address many issues. Democracy requires that the concerns of all citizens be addressed in this Assembly by granting, through the power of petitions, that the citizens of this province can bring issues to this Assembly, issues of policy, issues of expenditure. We thereby empower the citizens and involve them in the process of government, and surely that is the meaning of the word democracy.

We instill in the public consciousness the responsiveness of the Legislature to the needs of the people. This is the nature of democracy, and this is what is necessary for people to feel like it's worth their while to go to the polls and vote on election day. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South talked about this motion possibly conflicting with parliamentary procedures. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would hold that parliamentary procedures are defined in order to facilitate the democratic process and not to hinder such a process.

We sit here as a Legislative Assembly to serve the people of this province and not the parliamentary procedures and conventions of this House. We are elected to represent the people, and surely to allow Albertans to bring issues to the floor through petition is not to give in to government by petition. This motion merely allows for petitions to be brought to the attention of the Legislature and the concerns of the people of this province. If these petitions are merely representations of narrow interest groups, that should be the determination of this Legislative Assembly and not of one member who may have a totally opposite but equally narrow focus.

If petitions present a truly untenable position, surely we as politicians and those people responsible to the people of Alberta as a whole are able to determine this. If names are obtained on the petitions through unsavoury means, we will still need to determine the legitimacy of the cause. If we are principled people, as politicians we must look to the well-being and the greater good of all citizens, and we will not simply give in to lobbyists and interest groups.

When I hear that a petition today will mean a plebiscite tomorrow, I think this is to raise a red herring and is a bit of scaremongering. Let's keep to the issue. Petitions are suggested in order to bring matters to the floor of this Assembly. It requires a significant number of voters: 3 to 5 percent -- not an easy task, not particularly susceptible to the collection procedures outlined by the Member for Red Deer-South. I believe that we as thoughtful people should well be able to determine whether a petition will serve the people of Alberta and that this motion is a way to bring into this Legislative Assembly greater democracy for the people of Alberta. I would therefore urge support.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Drumheller.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In rising to participate in the debate over Motion 221, I have to respectfully disagree with my learned friend from Edmonton-Strathcona. And I'm quite surprised that I find him sponsoring this motion.

coming originally from Great Britain, the United Kingdom, where Westminster is located, because I believe what he's doing here is actually bringing to our jurisdiction something that he seems to be afraid of in other areas. You know, we have a free trade initiative under way, and I hear members of his party -- and I've no doubt will be hearing from him in the days ahead -- that we can't have free trade because that's going to bring an American influence to this country that would be bad. But really, this type of proposal that he's bringing to us today is in the nature of direct democracy, and that had its home and beginnings in the United States, I believe.

We've had experiences with that here in the form of recall legislation, which started in the United States. I guess when that was attempted in the constituency of Okotoks or High River -- I don't know which it was, but when our former Premier Aberhart was elected, I think it was Okotoks that elected him -- they didn't care for what he was doing. They started a recall petition, and that was the end of recall in this province. We haven't found anybody else to bring that back to us. But we didn't really like, as Albertans I guess, that type of direct democracy.

The proposal of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is in that same tradition: to allow people, as the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has suggested, to bring matters directly before this Legislature. I think we should remember the tools that we have, and we're using them right now. The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore pointed out that if the timing goes correctly and nothing else intervenes, her motion will be discussed on Thursday regarding declaring this province a nuclear-free zone, something near and dear to her heart but not as universally supported by some of the rest of us. I look forward to having something to say on that matter on Thursday.

This Legislature and the rules we've written for its operation are very open to allow all the concerns of Albertans to be brought before the Chamber for discussion. We allow four hours per week and, as the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore suggested in her own remarks, she is going to be able to do something that somebody else didn't notice, I guess, three or four or five years ago when the other petition that she mentioned came forward; 8,000 signatures, she said. And it wasn't dealt with. I don't know what the New Democratic Party caucus was doing in those days, but you would have thought that there certainly was the mechanism for them to bring forward that subject for ventilation. And as my hon. friend has suggested in his motion, it really amounts to three hours of debate and then it will be disposed of. Three hours of debate really isn't very long, and any government can stand to hunker down for three hours of debate, and if they don't want to do it, it will have had three hours of debate, and that's it.

But the other part of that is that we do have, as I've already suggested, in private members' time, four hours a week to deal with any and all subjects. We can't bring in things to deal with the spending of money, but we can suggest that the government consider spending money, and that gets to the same end that three hours of debate on a petition would get to, in my humble submission.

I wonder how the New Democrats would feel if a petition was organized to ask the government to do away with abortion committees in this province. This thing could be a two-edged sword, and that might get more support from the people if they were given the opportunity and the encouragement and the vehicle to use it than one might think. There could also be a petition to this Chamber to have a really effective work-for-welfare program whereby people should go out and work on road gangs if

they want to get welfare. You know, a lot of people in this province would like to have that dealt with and considered.

REV. ROBERTS: How about an ambulance service?

MR. SCHUMACHER: That might be dealt with too. But I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre will find that the ambulance service of this province will be dealt with in a much shorter time frame than it would take to organize a petition containing either 45,500 or 75,700 signatures.

AN HON. MEMBER: How about a new leader for your party?

MR. SCHUMACHER: What do you mean a new leader? We have the best leader of every party in the country sitting in here [inaudible]. I beg your pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not what I hear on the street. [interjections]

MR. STRONG: Not on the 18th hole.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. Order please. If the hon. Member for St. Albert wishes to join the debate, he could perhaps speak after the Member for Drumheller.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Going back to the taking of time for government business, I pointed out that we have four hours a week for any type of general discussion we want now under the existing rules. If a lot of people are concerned about a matter, surely the MLAs present will hear about it and will be responsive to their constituents and bring it before us. But because of the amount of time we do devote to private members' business, that by necessity limits the amount of time available for government business. The government, if it's elected to do something, has to have a certain amount of time. Maybe some of us, though, would feel that governments do do too much, and maybe we should impinge further on government time by having nonbinding, three-hour debates resulting from petitions. We might be better off. I might find a certain attraction for that, but that's just theoretically speaking.

As a practical matter governments do have things to deal with. We find that budgets take a lot of consideration. Not all members in the opposition feel that they don't get enough time to consider that type of government business, but maybe they wouldn't have as much as they have now if we've got to interfere with that time that's allotted to respond to petitions. So I think they should consider the practicality of what they're proposing.

I don't have anything against the United States' system of government. That's fine for them. I think it has certain benefits, but after studying both systems fairly completely, I believe, and participating in the present system and always learning more and more about the benefits of our present system, I think the parliamentary system is better than the congressional or presidential system. I don't think we should be importing alien influences in this regard.

I think we have a very responsive Legislature and government. It was certainly proved yesterday that in the last year and a half a large area of this province strongly endorses the responsiveness of the present government. I'm sorry my friends on the right here happened to come last and really lost their position from the 1986 general election.

So I don't know; when we talk about responsiveness, I think we have a record of performance. This Legislature does work; this government does perform. I think we should carry on with the way we've been doing it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been much entertained by the discussion this afternoon. It's one of the more vigorous we've had in this Legislature for a while, and I appreciate the comments that have been made, which I think have been put forward in the spirit of constructive criticism.

But underneath those comments, Mr. Speaker -- I really have been listening carefully -- it's been hard for me to determine what exactly it is that's being put forward by members opposed to this motion that would in any way make this Assembly perform any more adequately. They say they are in favour of parliamentary reform, in favour of making this Assembly work better, but I've heard nothing of any substance to back up those kinds of comments. Because at its core I think what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is presenting us with is a question. It's whether the public will find here in this Chamber a parliamentary democracy at work or a parliamentary club at work.

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, what this motion wants to do is to provide an opportunity for the public to help determine the agenda of this Assembly. That's really all the motion does. It provides an avenue, an opportunity, whereby Albertans, if enough of them agree with a particular initiative, can put an item on the agenda of this Assembly for three hours. That's really what this motion does. It says that if enough people are concerned about a particular issue, they have the right to expect that this Assembly will spend at least three hours in debating their concern, in taking their point of view seriously. That's what it does. The motion says that if 3 percent or 5 percent of the people of this province want an initiative to be debated in this Assembly and they have the requisite number of signatures, this Assembly would then debate that point of view for three hours.

I don't see how this is going to bring down the walls around us, that somehow this is going to make the work of this Assembly something close to bordering on anarchy. It simply says that this Assembly would debate it for three hours and then be presented with a motion: whether the petition's prayer is accepted or not. If it's not accepted, that's the end of it. The three hours of debate is over, the issue's been dealt with, it's received a hearing. Members from all sides of the House, from every corner of the province, will have had a chance to say whether they agree or not, and it's disposed of.

But in that debate, if there is some merit to the petition and to that point of view, then it can receive some further consideration by the Assembly. It would have to have some significant merit, determined by the members of this Assembly, if it were to proceed to that second step. And the government, in accepting that motion, would understand that in taking it through the second step, it might eventually be passed by this Assembly in a free vote. It would have to be a free vote because under this proposed provision of the Standing Orders the government would not fall or the question of confidence would not be in-

voked if that motion were passed or if it were defeated. It specifically provides, under this proposed Standing Order, that a matter brought to this Assembly in this way would not invoke a question of confidence. There's no other matter, no other motion that would so be considered. Only a motion that would be before the members of the Assembly through this route would be treated in this way.

Yet, you know, I hear the opposition raise that somehow the government would be defeated or ought to be defeated if a motion were to be defeated under such a vote. Mr. Speaker, that's not at all what's being put in front of the members of the Assembly, and I hope they would read this proposed Standing Order with due care. Because what it's doing is opening up an avenue that does not presently exist for the people of this province to have in a direct way some say over the agenda of this Assembly.

Now, if this borrows from the American experience, so be it. If we can learn from the Americans, great. If direct democracy is evident in the United States -- and we have examples of that, and it works and cuts both ways, as the hon. Member for Drumheller has pointed out. If it helps make Albertans masters in their own province, that's great. If we can learn how to be more effective and learn from our American friends how we can do a better job in making this democracy wider and more open and accepting to the people of this province, if we can learn from our American friends how to do that more effectively, so much the better. Parliamentary democracies have evolved all over the Commonwealth with different rules and Standing Orders, different models. The way we conduct ourselves in this Assembly is not the way it's done totally in New Zealand or Australia or India. If we can learn from those next to us how to do a better job, so what? That's great. I think the member should be commended for that.

But what amazes me more than anything is the reference to: the way we operate is just great; couldn't be improved in any way, shape, or form. Yet I'd be very interested to learn what, if any, petitions that have been presented to this Assembly have actually resulted in changes in government policy. I'd really be interested for somebody to stand up and demonstrate how the petitions that have come to this Assembly, let's say just in the last five years, have resulted in new government policy. It may well have done. That may well have been the case. But the speakers who have risen in their place so far have not been able to point to those examples. There may be instances where private members' Bills have been adopted by this Legislature, but concrete examples of that escape me. I have not heard them, that private members' Bills have ever been adopted by this Assembly. They may have gone past second reading, but to my knowledge ... [interjections] Well, there's time left for members to stand up and explain. Out of all the hundreds of private members' Bills that have been debated in this Legislature, what's the track record? What percentage of them have been enacted into the laws of this province? I'd be interested in hearing members stand up and show that there's a good, large percentage that has been adopted. The same with petitions.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the final irony is that we have heard two points of view expressed this afternoon. One is that the requirements which the hon. member has incorporated in his motion are too onerous. Three percent of the voting population represents 45,000 people. We have no experience of a petition of 45,000 names having been presented to this Assembly, nor a petition of 75,000 names, having to do with the expenditure of money. These numbers of petitions are outside the experience

of this Assembly. Therefore, the argument is that this motion before us is too onerous; the requirements are too onerous for it to work in a practical sense. On the other hand, we've heard it referred to as: it will result in government by petition; special interest groups will have the right to determine the agenda of this Assembly; it will be opening up the doors so wide that -- the impression was left to me -- there will be nothing else; there will be nothing else on our agenda except motions that are referred to us via petitions.

So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I'm sure would be as confused as I am: whether what's wrong with this motion is that it opens the door too wide or whether it keeps it closed too tightly. Both these arguments have been advanced in opposition to his motion. I can only conclude that he must have reached the right middle ground if he's being assailed on both sides for the requirements he has incorporated in his motion.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, what it boils down to is whether the members of this Assembly will continue to see this as a parliamentary club that we don't want to open the doors any further or whether we see this Assembly as a place where the people of Alberta have a right that's not available to citizens of most countries; where they have the right to set the agenda of their government in a direct way, albeit a modest way; that they can bring to the attention of the legislators, their elected representatives, concerns that they have and require of those members that they at least give debate and consideration to those concerns. That's the question in front of the members of this Assembly, and I for one am proud and pleased to be able to say that I support the initiative put before us this afternoon by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MR. PAYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Initially, sir, I'd like to compliment the members who have participated in what I think most would agree has been a fairly interesting debate this afternoon. I run the obvious risk, though, of being number eight in the parade, and much that deserves to be said has been said. I would, however, in the moments remaining like to make one or two additional comments and make what I hope will be one or two useful suggestions for consideration of the sponsoring member.

In his introductory remarks the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona urged the members to be nondenominational in their approach to this motion today -- I infer he means that our review of his proposal should be objective and with very little passion -- and further suggested that this would mean simply a procedural change. I think with that phrase and with the tone there was perhaps an inadvertent attempt to lull us into some false sense of legislative security. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to suggest that there is far more to be considered today than a mere procedural change. The implications of the motion before us this afternoon would, I suggest, change dramatically the role of the Legislature and the democratic process by giving petitioners considerable new powers. Could I suggest today that a constitutional change of this magnitude would be better accomplished via a substantive legislative reform Bill rather than through amendments to our procedural Standing Orders? I would wel-

come an opportunity to participate in a debate in a subsequent sitting on such a Bill, whether it came from the government side or from the opposition side.

I would like to suggest full compliments to the Member for Red Deer-South today. I think his reasoned approach to the motion was worth listening to and worth heeding. I would hope he would not be offended, though, if I raised a question with respect to one comment he made; that is, he said that laws should not be made in the streets; they should be made in the Assembly. I know that he and all members here today would agree that, yes, laws are made here in the Assembly, but surely they must represent the views of those in the streets, whom we represent.

I was also interested in the remarks of the Member for Drumheller, and the only comment he made that I could seriously question was the expression: three hours of debate isn't very long. Now, without wishing to denigrate in any way the quality of debate in this Assembly, I must admit that on some occasions three hours of debate wasn't as engaging or as captivating as it might have been.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I did want to make one or two comments with respect to the remarks made by my colleague for Calgary-North Hill. I thought his reasoned and careful review of the motion, coupled with his presentation of several interesting options, bears further examination. I would hope that if and when the members of the Assembly return to a review or a discussion of the principles of this motion before us today, Motion 221, some of our members might undertake some additional study of the interesting alternatives the Member for Calgary-North Hill put before the Assembly today.

Finally, there was a reference by two of the members today to such mechanisms for parliamentarians as town hall meetings and storefront government meetings in obtaining the views of constituents on issues of the day. As one who has conducted storefront governments in three suburban shopping centres on a periodic basis for about seven years, Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize as strongly as I can the usefulness of this mechanism. I'm not suggesting that storefront government sessions or town hall meetings displace the role of the petition. Obviously, there's a useful role for the petition, and I think that role is acknowledged in our present Standing Orders. But I know that I speak for all the members when I indicate that the people of this province have frequent and ample opportunity to access government.

I was concerned by the comments passed by the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, who quoted concerns of constituents or others who felt they were denied access to the process. I just simply can't accept that. Certainly in Calgary-Fish Creek, and I would hope in all the constituencies of the province, constituents of every walk of life have, as I say, frequent and ample opportunity to access the processes of government.

ANHON. MEMBER: You're doing good. Another minute.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. PAYNE: Well, before I respond to the useful suggestions of the colleagues who flank me, I would like to return one final time to the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, in which she used the phrase "the nature of democracy." I know that I speak for opposition and government members alike when I indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that we all share a great interest in the nature of democracy and want to take whatever oppor-

tunities are afforded us as members of the Assembly to ensure, in a qualitative sense, the nature of democracy in our province. But it's hard for me to resist the temptation, parenthetically, Mr. Speaker, to indicate that the nature and quality of democracy were both very well served in the electoral results achieved in the Chinook constituency yesterday.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you may recall that at the conclusion of our deliberations yesterday it was necessary for the Government House Leader to move that we arrest the clock in flight, and I would like to avoid the necessity for such a motion today. I know you would probably appreciate that there are a considerable number of members who undoubtedly would like to participate in the debate on this motion before us, so therefore might I suggest that we adjourn debate and readdress the matter later in the sitting.

MR. SPEAKER: Those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, just by way of reiteration, the business tomorrow will be the debate on the Meech Lake accord, the resolution which is before us, dealing with that.

[At 5:26 p.m. the House adjourned to Wednesday at 2:30 p.m.]

