

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA**

Title: **Thursday, December 3, 1987 2:30 p.m.**

Date: 87/12/03

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

**PRAYERS**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land.

From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity.

Lord, grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges.

Amen.

head: **PRESENTING PETITIONS**

MR. TAYLOR: I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that the petition I presented yesterday be read.

head: **READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS**

MR. SCHUMACHER: Mr. Speaker, I move that the petition for private Bills presented before the Assembly on December 2, 1987, be now read and received.

[Motion carried]

CLERK:

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta:

We the undersigned request that the Assembly establish an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly to conduct public hearings on the Meech Lake accord to examine in particular the following factors:

- (a) the requirement that Senate reform be approved by all 10 provinces instead of just seven;
- (b) whether there should be any appointments to the Senate prior to reform;
- (c) whether aboriginal rights and interprovincial barriers to trade should be included in future constitutional discussions;
- (d) the proposed requirements for the establishment of new provinces; and
- (e) whether the opting-out clause will affect national programs.

head: **INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the Members of the Legislative Assembly, a group that represents the greatest resource in the province of Alberta, our youth. There are 24 grade 12 students from Central high in Sedgewick. It's unique in that they represent students coming in from the constituencies of Stettler, Camrose, Wainwright, and Vermilion-Viking. They are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Greg Martin. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, it's with pleasure that I introduce on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly, 55 students from the Belmont school. They are grade 6 students, accompanied today by teachers Mr. Osland, Mr. Norris, and Miss Carson. I ask members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming them to the House.

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly, some 27 students from the Westlawn school who are in the members' gallery with their assistant principal Fred Alexandruk. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, two visitors from the Calgary Centre for Performing Arts. This centre has welcomed three-quarters of a million visitors since opening less than two years ago, and the centre provides a home for Alberta Theatre Projects, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, and Theatre Calgary, as well as sponsoring numerous presentations directly. They are Gail Hinchcliff, the chairman of the executive management board, and Doug Lauchlan, general manager of the centre. I would ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair asks the House's forgiveness. I'd like to make one short personal note. Mr. Lauchlan and myself were together in the first university team chaplaincy in all of Canada many years ago.

head: **ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

**Free Trade**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my first question to the Premier. Another day in the Legislature, and we wait for more inspired rhetoric from the Premier on the Mulroney trade deal.

Mr. Speaker, a new study by the Canadian Independent Computer Services Association says that 150,000 jobs will be lost in Canada and the U.S. in the computer industry because they will be moving to the U.S. They're subsidiaries, and even Canadian firms will be moving. He estimates 150,000 jobs. My question to the Premier: could he give us, other than naive faith and low-grade rhetoric -- could the Premier indicate his assessment of the study? Specifically how many of these jobs will be lost in the province of Alberta?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, there are studies from various groups all over Canada and the United States and, I must say, even those from beyond both those countries, and I'm unable to give the hon. Leader of the Opposition assessments of all those studies.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'd like some assessment of some studies, of some facts in this Alberta Legislature. But in view of the fact that this is obviously a very important industry in the province of Alberta, has the Premier made representation to the Prime Minister and asked why the service sector was included in this Mulroney trade deal?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the matters that are included in the

trade agreement with the United States are matters which will assist the province of Alberta and the people of Alberta to a great deal. There may be some possible areas where there'll be problems, but we think that working together with Albertans, we can handle it.

MR. MARTIN: I appreciate the enthusiasm and the spirit of the opposite team over there, but what we want to know are some facts, Mr. Speaker, some facts. The heaviest burden of job losses in the service sector, in the computer industry, would be jobs like computer and data processing, and the Premier surely should be aware that 80 percent of those jobs are women's jobs. My question to the Premier: has he assessed what will happen to these particular jobs for women in this province? If so, what is that assessment?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, our assessment is that the trade agreement will increase the number of jobs available to all Albertans, including women, in a great number.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting that we're not getting any evidence in this Legislature of this Mulroney trade deal being beneficial. I say again to the Premier, would he indicate to this Assembly: do they have studies prevailing to the service sector or not? If so, so we can debate this intelligently here rather than rhetoric or hoping, will he table those studies here in this Legislature today?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as I've said to the hon. Leader of the Opposition many times in the House, he should place his requests on the Order Paper and the House decides.

MR. R. SPEAKER: A supplementary question to the Premier, and it follows from these questions and also the question I raised the other day with regards to attempting to tell both sides of the story in terms of the implications of free trade. We all know we're going to have job losses or better called, I would say, job relocation. As well, we're going to have job gains, which is a very positive side. Could the Premier indicate, in terms of the government plans or the plans of the Premier, whether a transitional team of ministers and senior civil servants is being put in place to prepare ourselves for this transition when the free trade agreement is put in place?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, that has been discussed with the federal government as well, and such a plan would be put in place.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, back to the original question on the computer industry. Has the Premier met with the representatives of the computer industry here in Alberta to assess their cares and concerns and evaluate what they are worried about?

MR. GETTY: As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the members of the technology and the computer industry that I've talked to feel that the trade arrangement is good for their industry.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: I'd like to know who that group was. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to designate my second question to the Mem-

ber for Edmonton-Highlands.

### **Social Allowance Cuts**

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, as I recall, about a year after the 1982 election the Lougheed government took one of its biggest axes to the Social Services department and particularly the grants going to the poor and vulnerable. About a year before the 1986 election the government reversed part of that policy, increased the rates going to social allowance recipients, and the demand at the food bank dropped. Mr. Speaker, no surprise of history, about a year after the 1986 election the government did the same thing and axed the social allowance funding again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MS BARRETT: I have a question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Good.

MS BARRETT: As a matter of fact, quite a few questions.

MR. FOX: You're not going to like the question.

MS BARRETT: That's right. You might want me to stick with the preamble.

Mr. Speaker, my question is: will the Premier now commit his government to abandoning its policy of punishing the poor and the vulnerable and increase the amount of money provided for the food and shelter allowances for those people so that they don't have to go to the food bank?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, of course the government has never had any such policy. The government will always try and balance the resources available to it, the taxpayers' dollars, amongst the various needs throughout the province.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that about 70,000 cases in the province wouldn't agree with the Premier's contention. My question to the Premier is this: can he confirm that Social Services department officials told social allowance recipients, poor people, last month that they had to go to the food bank to get food because the money allocated for that month for emergency food vouchers was exhausted? Can he confirm that?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a question that involves the Department of Social Services. The minister is away and will be back soon, and I'll refer the question to her. She can reply at that time.

MS BARRETT: Funny thing, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seems to be in control when he likes the question, and he turfs it to his ministers when he doesn't like the question. A lot of poor people want the Premier to answer on behalf of his government.

Will the Premier indicate what plan his government has to accommodate the very serious needs of the poor and the hungry, of which there are hundreds of thousands in this province, when the hardest part of winter arrives and they have to spend even more of their food allowance on paying the heat bills? What are those plans?

MR. GETTY: I would only say, Mr. Speaker, that the taxpayers of Alberta are generous and support the poor, the needy, and the

hungry as well as any government in Canada.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary question.

MS BARRETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker, a final supplementary question to the man who is all heart. Would he like to come to the Highlands constituency office and deal with these people?

My final supplementary question is: will the Premier commit his government to ensuring that no department official has to instruct any individual to go to the food bank because they putatively have run out of money for emergency food vouchers in one month? Will he commit to that?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of the opposition raises a situation that I'm not sure exists. Therefore, if she waits to discuss it with the Minister of Social Services, she'll get her answer.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Supplementary, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The facts of the case simply do not bear out the Premier's confidence in the province of Alberta. There's been no review since 1982 in any comprehensive fashion whatsoever. I don't know about your utility bills, but mine have changed, and my household bills, substantially in that time.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Will he please undertake right now to do an immediate review of the welfare rates relative to the cost of living in this province so that people are not deprived and forced to go and beg for food?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, nobody in Alberta is forced to go and beg for food. As the Minister of Social Services has said many times in the Legislature, there is constant assessment of whether or not the social service rates are sufficient, and that assessment will always be carried out.

#### **Racing Commission**

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, my question, too, today is to the Premier. I received the report -- I'm sure most of you have here -- in the last couple of days on the Alberta Racing Commission. I'm sure the Premier is aware that there was quite an increase in the contribution of revenue from the Alberta government from \$3 million to nearly \$7 million a year. How, in view of cutting 3 percent off health care aids, aids to the disabled, cutting our education budget, and we've heard today cuts to the welfare, can he justify the increase of nearly double the amount of money the provincial government is giving to horse racing in this province?

MR. GETTY: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the government isn't giving anything to the Racing Commission at all. As a matter of fact, it's the money that they raise themselves through taxes.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, that's a cop-out. They are taxes that are made under racing. What they've turned right around -- and by giving that tax back to racing, they say they're not doing it. That's like giving the money back to guys that give licences, giving the income tax back. The fact is that it's a tax.

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

MR. TAYLOR: Now, Mr. Speaker, what is bothering me most of all here is that . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. We're into supplementaries. Perhaps you could race along to the question.

MR. TAYLOR: I just didn't expect to be horsed around, Mr. Speaker.

ANHON. MEMBER: The old grey mare, she ain't what she used to be.

MR. TAYLOR: The old gray mare isn't what she used to be.

Mr. Speaker, in one of these items in the doubling of the grant given out for horse racing, purse supplements were increased from \$2 million to over \$4 million. Could the Premier tell the House whether any of his racing stable reached or achieved or received any of this increase of \$2 million to the horse racing industry last year?

MR. SPEAKER: The question is really out of order, hon. member.

MR. TAYLOR: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Well, we'll take it up at the end. All right, then.

ANHON. MEMBER: You know the rules, Nick.

MR. TAYLOR: The rules are quite simple. I asked the Premier whether he benefited from this double benefit to the horse racing industry, and you've saved him.

Could he go this far then, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, that's inappropriate. Please get on to the supplementary.

MR. TAYLOR: Okay. The supplementary then, Mr. Speaker. There is also a bonus for what they call the breeders' premium. That was doubled from \$800,000 to \$1.9 million. Can the Premier tell us whether he has any interest in any stable that advantaged from the breeders' premium?

MR. SPEAKER: Well, that's in the same category as the last one.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I must say that from this side looking at the hon. member, it looks like the horse is turned around.

Mr. Speaker, I have never been in the business of raising horses through the breeding system, and therefore I obviously would not have participated.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, the last supplementary is with respect to horse racing. Does he agree, as the first statement in here says, that the grants from the government to horse racing are job creative? Has he made any study to find out which creates the most jobs for dollar invested, horse racing or dollars put into education?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member could raise the same question as to whether or not dollars into agriculture, dollars into energy, or dollars into any industry in our province. Might I say that the racing industry is an important part of our agriculture industry. It employs many, many people; it's also

involved in tourism, and it's also involved in recreation. There's a large body of Albertans who enjoy this, first as a form of recreation, it attracts people in tourism, and it also employs many Albertans. And the hon. leader of the Liberal Party brings no credit to himself by trying to knock that industry.

MR. TAYLOR: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Fine. Duly noted.

MR. ROSTAD: As the minister responsible for the Racing Commission, could I add supplementary information? I'd like to clarify ... [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will decide. Yesterday the Chair got some influence on it because it had allowed someone else to give it the other day, and then the Chair also gets it if you don't allow it. So here's one of those racing flipped coins. You're on.

MR. ROSTAD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to point out to the hon. member that the money that goes to the purses comes as a tax of 5 percent on the handle -- those are the bets that are placed by the people interested in the industry -- and 4 percent of that money is sent back out to the Racing Commission to enrich breeding of horses and development of the racing industry within Alberta, which does employ 6,000. The other 1 percent of the tax goes out to the exhibition industry, and with that increase of \$2 billion in the equine industry and employing 6,000, I think that is significant.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary on the issue? Pincher Creek-Crowsnest.

MR. BRADLEY: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. This supplementary is in the same vein as the line of questioning of the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon. To the Minister of Energy: could he confirm whether or not Lochiel resources ever received benefit from the Alberta tax credit? [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Further supplementaries on the real issue. Supplementary for the government is gone, Member for Calgary-Millican. [interjection] No, hon. member; sorry. Leader of the Representative caucus followed by Red Deer-North followed by Calgary-Forest Lawn.

#### University of Lethbridge

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Deputy Premier or Minister of Advanced Education. It's with regards to a motion that we had in this Assembly Tuesday last, urging the government to consider increasing the base budget of the University of Lethbridge, and the motion on which all speakers wholeheartedly agreed it should be considered by government. Would the minister indicate whether he or the government is prepared at this time to move that motion into the category of a government motion for consideration and passage?

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, it's very timely that motion did come before the House when it did, because that matter was one that was dealt with by Dr. Dupré when he was conducting his equity study regarding the institutions that are involved in the system. I expect his recommendations will shortly be laid be-

fore the House.

MR. TAYLOR: Change their name to a race track.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Little Bow, not Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the minister. The University of Lethbridge's unique mandate, which has been agreed upon by this government, causes certain special funding *needs*. Could the minister indicate whether the government still agrees with that mandate and that financial responsibilities associated with it will be considered?

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, the mandate of the University of Lethbridge is something which, in my view, does merit and deserve reconsideration and review, and I believe that view is held by the board of governors and the new president. So I expect that will be undertaken.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary to the minister. The minister has indicated that the Dupré study will be tabled, and in *Hansard* of November 24 the minister indicated that would happen this week. Is it still the intention of the minister to table it this week? Could the minister indicate as well that the government will make a commitment to enact the recommendations of that Dupré study in the upcoming fiscal year.

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, naturally I can't give that precommitment, but the statements which I made at the time the study was launched indicated that we were anxious to identify inequities if they did exist and anxious, if we were able, to work on rectifying them. That commitment is still there. I think hon. members are aware that Dr. Dupré did have a heart attack near the end of the study, and the report is still at the printers. Whether I'll get it in tomorrow or perhaps next week, I can't say, but it's imminent.

MR. R. SPEAKER: To the minister. Could he indicate, in terms of this imminent report and in his consideration of following through on the recommendations, whether some type of a policy with regards to equity, a general policy, will be made available as well on behalf of governments so that when inequities are discovered in our various secondary educational institutions, it can be dealt with under an equity-type policy rather than on an ad hoc basis?

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, we do have such a policy in effect now and do not deal with institutions on an ad hoc basis.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, can the minister advise the House whether he'll be taking up the invitation of some 650 University of Lethbridge students to visit the campus and familiarize himself with problems that resident students face?

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I expect to visit the University of Lethbridge again from time to time during my tenure in this office, as I will other institutions. I've been there a couple of times since my appointment, and I do expect to return.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you. The minister referred to the Dupré report, and I note that the government has paid a fortune to expand the plant at Mount Royal College which is capable of handling 1,200 more students, but there are no funds for operating. Would the minister be able to tell this House whether Dr. Dupré's report covers the issue of Mount Royal College and perhaps tantalize us with a hint of what the direction of his comments are?

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will invoke relevancy to the line of questioning. To date four out of the five questions have been with regard to the University of Lethbridge. The Chair recognizes the Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. GOGO: A supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister in view of the question asked by the Member for Little Bow regarding the equity study by Dr. Dupré of Toronto. For clarification, hon. minister, is it planned that you as minister will meet with the presidents of the institutions and perhaps the chairman as quickly as possible following the release of that report?

MR. RUSSELL: Yes, that would be the plan, Mr. Speaker. I think it's fair to make the report available as early as possible to the people that were responsible for making submissions on behalf of their institutions.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by Calgary-Forest Lawn.

### **HIB Vaccine**

MR. OLDRING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Community and Occupational Health, and it concerns the HIB vaccine which is now being administered to Alberta children. Would the minister please advise this Assembly which children are eligible to receive the HIB vaccine, which prevents a number of dangerous illnesses including the sometimes fatal meningitis?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, members will recall that we introduced in the March budget a provision whereby all two year olds in the province would be able to receive the haemophilis influenza B vaccine which would prevent their acquiring the fatal meningitis disease. As well, for children three to five years old who are exposed to a number of other children on a day-to-day basis or for those children who have a medical problem, these children too are eligible for the vaccine through our health unit system.

MR. OLDRING: Supplementary. Mr. Speaker. Could the minister advise this Assembly whether or not parents of children who are not eligible for the vaccine because they are not cared for in a day care centre but are cared for at home instead . . .

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, those children, say, at the age of three or four or five years old who are not at an increased risk such as those who might be with a number of other children in a day care centre on a day-to-day basis, may receive the vaccine and make arrangements through their physician.

MR. OLDRING: Well, Mr. Speaker, children who do not attend day care on a regular basis may still occasionally attend

play school or other programs involving several children and may certainly come into contact with this dangerous and potentially fatal virus. A further supplementary to the minister. Can he assure this Assembly that children that fall into this category can receive the vaccine at no cost?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, those children who need it and who are at increased risk of acquiring the disease will receive it. Those children in play school or day care more than two or three days a week will receive the vaccine through the health units.

MR. OLDRING: Final supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister consider making this vaccine available to all Alberta children that require it at no cost in order to ensure two things: that, one, no child is unnecessarily exposed to this health risk; and two, that families where mothers stay home to care for their children are not being penalized even further by having to pay?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, the children, in fact, who are at the greatest risk are those children under the age of two years old. Unfortunately, the federal government has been unable to license a suitable vaccine for these children under the age of two. In fact, I'm told that some two out of every three cases of the disease are found in kids under the age of two years. It's hoped that by the spring of 1988 this vaccine will be licensed; it will be available through the federal government. And once it has been licensed, then we will be providing it through our provincewide immunization program.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn, followed by Ponoka-Rimbey, Edmonton-Glengarry, Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-Kingsway, Calgary-North West. Calgary-Forest Lawn.

### **Energy Industry**

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's deregulation of the gas industry a year ago was clearly a preparation for the Mulroney trade deal, and it also represents a sell-out of Alberta gas at fire sale prices. It's all there in the agreement: get rid of the border price; slash the surplus test; sell our gas at whatever price we can get. So while oil prices are rebounding to levels that are acceptable, gas prices continue to plummet, and this government's policies are clearly responsible. To the Minister of Energy: is he not concerned that since mid-1986 world oil prices rebounded dramatically while gas prices continue to plummet?

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should realize that there is the problem of supply/demand with respect to natural gas in North America. We agreed along with the federal government and the other producing provinces to go through the process of natural gas deregulation, as the industry wanted to as well. I might add that the industry, by and large, are very supportive of the fact that we have done so. The primary objective of that natural gas deregulation was to get access to the U.S. gas markets.

Now, Mr. Speaker, access to the U.S. markets have not come about as expected, primarily because of the problem of supply/demand. I could give you and the hon. member a considerably lengthy answer in terms of the benefits to the industry of natural gas deregulation, but I think all one has to do is point to the activity that's in the province right now, in both the exploration

and development on the gas side as well as the oil side, to show how the industry has responded to the steps this government has taken.

MR. PASHAK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly true. There's no activity without government incentives. Just look at the minibooms we've had the weeks before the royalty holiday declines. And this certainly hasn't been aided by falling revenues. All right, to the Minister of Energy: will he confirm that by granting royalty holidays, it has cut the effective royalty rate by 10.8 percent in the last year?

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, we could go through the reasons why the industry has responded to the activity. [interjections] The important thing is that activity is occurring . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

DR. WEBBER: . . . and there are primarily three reasons, one being the stabilization of prices on the world scene as far as oil is concerned and, secondly, the fiscal regime that is in place and, thirdly, the finding costs that are in existence today.

With respect to the incentives that this government has provided, the royalty holidays were five-year royalty holidays and three-year royalty holidays for oil, not for gas as the hon. member seems to assume. So we don't have the same programs in place for natural gas as we do for oil. However, Mr. Speaker, the industry has responded; they are carrying out activity in the gas area, and we're happy because of that.

MR. PASHAK: Mr. Speaker, another supplementary to the minister. Will he confirm that plummeting gas prices have reduced the effect of royalty rates and have caused a 50 percent decrease in royalties coming into the Provincial Treasury?

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly the decline in gas prices in North America -- it's not an Alberta phenomenon; it's a North American phenomenon -- is, as the hon. member should know, related to the supply/demand situation and the fact that we do have a surplus situation in place today. Land sales is an area where the government has received a considerable increase in revenue this year, and that is a reflection of the positive attitude the industry has towards exploration and development. So when considering the decline in revenues from the natural gas side, there has been an increase on the oil side and also an increase overall on land sales, significant increases.

MR. PASHAK: Final supplementary, Mr. Speaker. This Premier lets gas flow across the border at uneconomic prices and cuts our effective royalty rates, all for a vague promise of guaranteed access to U.S. markets. Well, Albertans want to know what this access is worth, especially when our revenues have fallen by 50 percent as sales of U.S. gas into the U.S. market have increased by 18 percent. Can the Premier explain why the policies he's followed to comply with the Mulroney trade agreement have created an 18 percent increase in gas exports to the U.S. while we've had a 50 percent decrease in gas revenues? Is this the shape of the future to come for the people of Alberta?

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, the preambles the hon. member has been making to each of those questions are loaded with inaccuracies and misinformation. [interjections] There has been an increase in the access to the United States, a 25 percent

increase in the sales to the United States this year, which we treat as positive news not negative news, as the hon. member tries to interpret it. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to proceed if the hon. member is prepared to listen rather than sit there and try to be funny.

[The Member for Edmonton-Highlands rose]

MR. SPEAKER: It's rather unusual to have two members standing in the House at the same time. Perhaps the Chair could recognize the Minister of Energy to continue.

DR. WEBBER: Mr. Speaker, through the gas removal permit process we have made sure that the owners of the resource, the people of Alberta, get their fair share for the natural gas we sell. As a matter of fact, today -- if the hon. member hasn't already seen the press release, he probably will -- we have taken steps to make sure that the Crown gets its fair share for return on natural gas, at the same time allowing the producer, who in the past has been complaining that he hasn't been able to sell his gas because we've been making the decisions on the gas renewal permit side of things . . . We will be assured that we will get our fair share for natural gas and at the same time allow the producer to enter into agreements with the consumer to make agreements according to the objectives of natural gas deregulations.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister's department has recently moved to tighten up rules for collecting royalties and for eliminating leaks which arose from such stratagems as shifting production between wells and out-of-province sales. I was wondering whether the minister could tell us how much this government has lost while it slept and did nothing during the past two years.

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we had an Alberta border price in place, it was relatively easy to determine the royalties that were due to the government. When we went through the process of deregulation -- with the thousands of individual sales that are taking place, the process of determining royalties becomes much more complex. We've been working with the industry for a number of months now to try to review the whole natural gas royalty system. We have made the decision, as I indicated earlier, to take some initial steps which will improve the ability of the government to get its fair share for natural gas. At the same time, some of the minimization techniques that some of the companies have been involved in, trying to reduce their royalties to the province, that ability in the future would not be able to come about.

### Textbook Orders

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Education. It has been the expectation of Alberta publishers that when a textbook or other educational material is authorized by Alberta Education, an order of sufficient size to supply the students needing that book will be placed through the learning resources branch. Is the minister aware that this policy was recently changed and an order placed for a newly authorized book that was a very small fraction of what was expected by the publisher, with consequent financial problems resulting for the publisher and general concern in the industry?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that there was concern on the part of some Alberta educational publishers of the volume ordered by the Learning Resources Distributing Centre but not that the policy was changed.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, perhaps part of the problem is that really arrangements have been informally arrived at over the years and there is no policy. Is the minister taking any steps to ensure that such a policy will be developed in consultation with our small but potentially very, very good publishing industry?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, a different question. Perhaps it would help to explain that the Learning Resources Distributing Centre operates on a revolving fund; therefore, any decrease in its operating costs allows it to maximize the benefits that it can pass on to school boards. So there is clearly a balance in place. There is a substantial cost to the Learning Resources Distributing Centre when it carries a large inventory of books and therefore would have to reduce its benefits in terms of reduced costs for resources to school boards.

I have met with some of the Alberta publishers, and I believe a satisfactory resolution has been worked out, whereby the resources distributing centre will acquire basic resources in a volume amount that are beyond that required for immediate needs but will still be able to maintain maximum benefits for school boards.

MR. SPEAKER: Additional supplementaries?

Member for Edmonton-Glenarry, followed by Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Kingsway.

### **Oldman River Dam**

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based upon public hearings, the Environment Council of Alberta gave the government and the Minister of the Environment at the time some very good advice: (a) don't build the Oldman dam, and (b) if you ignore (a), at least don't use the Three Rivers site. Now the public gets a lot of very conflicting information about the dam, including the number of acres to be irrigated, and that even from the minister, where in a published letter he said it would be 170,000 acres and in his Oldman River dam update he said it was about 108,000 acres. I would like to ask the minister to clarify which of these figures is incorrect. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: The minister, when it's time for the House to come to order, yes please.

MR. KOWALSKI: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker. I'm not aware of what the member is talking about. I've had ample opportunity in this House on previous occasions to describe the physical parameters of the Oldman River dam. I've circulated to all Members of the Legislative Assembly documentation with respect to that, and the figure of 170,000 is the correct one.

MR. YOUNIE: I guess that means this document bearing his signature, which said that 108,000 acres were appropriate, must be incorrect. I appreciate that clarification.

Can the minister explain why he is going ahead with this dam while also proceeding with canal expansions and offstream storage projects which will make the Oldman dam unnecessary for irrigation purposes?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the Oldman River dam is one of the most important water management projects this government has undertaken. What the Oldman River dam will do is ensure that there will be a storage facility for water that will provide water to some 55 communities in southern Alberta, including the city of Lethbridge. It will provide water for recreation, which will provide for enhancement of wildlife in the southern part of the province of Alberta. It will provide water for industrial growth and expansion in the southern part of the province of Alberta. It will provide water for people to be able to live in southern Alberta. It will provide water for a small number of acres that will have to be provided in terms of an agricultural perspective.

Mr. Speaker, the Oldman River dam entails water management. All members of this Assembly now surely know, and I'm sure most people of Alberta recognize as well, that by interprovincial agreement the province of Alberta must provide to the province of Saskatchewan 50 percent of the water that flows from our Rocky Mountains in our province. By interprovincial agreement as well the province of Saskatchewan will provide to the province of Manitoba 50 percent of that water as well. We must manage our water. We must conserve this very precious resource for life in the southern part of our province, and that's exactly what the intent of the Oldman River dam is.

MR. YOUNIE: Mr. Speaker, many Albertans believe it will also provide water for the United States, and that's their greatest fear. Now, in view of the fact that Simon Reisman has advocated linking water diversion with the Brian Mulroney trade deal and that the Minister of the Environment is going ahead with projects that will serve the irrigation purposes of the Oldman dam, will the Premier of the province guarantee that this dam will never be used for a scheme to divert water to the United States?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I've never heard such unadulterated nonsense in my life.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you. The people would have preferred a guarantee or assurance.

For the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism in that case. In view of the archaeological and historical sites identified in the area of the Oldman dam, has the minister contemplated designating the area a historical resource under section 15 or 16 of the Historical Resources Act?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, this dam, which is so essential for so many people in southern Alberta, will offer this province an opportunity in the historic, archaeological, and prehistoric investigations to do a most unique investigation. Over the next two working seasons the most extensive mitigation plan will be undertaken by this department. Contrary to the member's question and the import in it, there are less than 170 sites which have been identified in this massive investigation that's been undertaken that will be below water. All of those sites will be examined, photographed, and the information assembled. And in some cases, working with the local advisory committee, buildings will be relocated.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the minister of public works. Could the minister indicate whether the land necessary for completion of this damsite and

the area for the water storage has been acquired from the private owners in the area, and has a fair land acquisition policy been established and implemented?

MR. ISLEY: At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, a bit in excess of 87 percent of the land base required has been acquired. We're currently negotiating with the last 13 or 14 landowners. I believe there's been a fair set of policies for acquiring the land, because up to this point in time I have received no direct complaints from a landowner, and I've even visited the site.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could just supplement that answer, which has to deal with acreage. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Thanks, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. GOGO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the Minister of the Environment. Insofar as the government listens to elected governments in this province, has the Minister of the Environment received from any elected government in southern Alberta, be it the city, town, village, hamlet, or municipal district, a request not to proceed with the construction of the Oldman dam?

MR. KOWALSKI: I must honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that I most certainly have not received such a request.

I might point out that in terms of all the requests and acreage we've been dealing with -- the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry talked about 108,000 acres, and I said the correct answer is 170,000 acres; that is correct. The 108,000 acres that the member talked dealt only with the acreage within the municipal district of Pincher Creek; 170,000 deals with all the acreages, including those outside of the municipal district of Pincher Creek. Let's not have any misleading information here further.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will recognize Calgary-Buffalo on this matter.

Time for question period has expired. Might we have unanimous consent to complete this series of questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?  
Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The courtesy is appreciated.

This is the Minister of the Environment's day. I have a question for him as well. Are Department of the Environment . . .

MR. SPEAKER: No, hon. member, sorry. This was with respect to a supplementary on that issue. [interjection] No, I'm sorry. It was with respect to a supplementary on that particular issue. The Chair had not recognized.

MR. TAYLOR: A point of order. Mr. Speaker. The gentleman from Calgary-Buffalo was standing when you made the call, so it would seem to me that he'd proceed with what was going on at that time.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair apologizes for any misunderstanding.

ing, but it was indeed the Chair's intention -- we were working through the last question, and we'd come to the last two possibilities for supplementaries on that issue. The member had jumped up rather quickly, and I assumed it was on behalf of that. That was what was going through my mind as I put the question to the House, and therefore question period is completed for today, except the Chair now recognizes the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon because I understand there are at least two points of order.

MR. TAYLOR: Two points of order, Mr. Speaker. When questioning the Premier -- I'm going to be a lawyer here yet, my second career -- you ruled a question . . . I asked the Premier whether or not he had received any funds from the Racing Commission's policy of rewarding breeders and purse supplements, and you put that out of order. Now, I've read 357 all the way through to (nn), about 15 possibilities, and I can't see, Mr. Speaker, what reasoning you're giving for ruling me out of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader on the point of order.

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, on the very same set of questions I would put the point that those questions were very clearly out of order. To begin with, if one examines the rule under 357(dd): "deal with matters not officially connected with Government or Parliament, or which are of a private nature" -- I am referring, of course, to *Beauchesne*. Now, those questions were very clearly of a private nature, just the same as the question would be if it concerned a Mr. B. Smith or a Mr. C. Smith or, for that matter, a Mr. N. Taylor. That would be a private nature.

I would also draw attention to our own House rules in section 34, where it refers to "questions . . . seeking information from ministers of the Crown relating to public affairs." That's what may be asked. This question was not at all relating to public affairs; this series of questions was very much directed to the private affairs of a member.

And further, I could cite citations in *Beauchesne* which clearly indicate that there would be some doubt about whether, unless they relate to the direct responsibility of a ministry, a minister in responding to questions, that should be responded to in any event or asked of that minister, quite apart from the question of them being out of order. Also, Mr. Speaker, our rules and citations are replete with references to imputations upon character, and I would submit that the direction of the racy questions we were hearing were very much inclined in that direction. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: No, hon. member, we speak once . . .

MR. TAYLOR: I just asked a question.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order, hon. member. We speak once to points of order.

MR. TAYLOR: Yes, that's what I'd like to do.

MR. SPEAKER: No, you already have, hon. member.

MR. TAYLOR: I didn't; I asked what the point of order was.



Now you tell me I spoke on it. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: I'm sure the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, when he examines the Blues, will discover that the member did indeed speak to the point of order. Nevertheless, as to how the member was able to peruse *Beauchesne*, the Chair will then have to read out several sections of *Beauchesne*, and if one would care to follow, first with regard to 357, section (1) and subsection (q) read:

A question oral or written must not:  
and then we come on to (q), and I quote:

contain or imply charges of a personal character  
and the questions as raised came perilously close to violating that.

Again, with subsection (x):

deal with an action of a Minister for which he is not responsible to Parliament, or with matters not within his official knowledge.

"Official" has to be underlined there.

Perhaps we could also go on to 359. Two subsections there apply, numbers (6) and (7). Six again refers to what we have just referred to:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

So part of that relates to the fact that the Premier is indeed not responsible for the Racing Commission.

Also, with respect to subsection (7) of 359:

A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.

The matter clearly was out of order, hon. member.

Now, if there is a legitimate second point of order, the member is now speaking to the second point of order only.

MR. TAYLOR: I hope with more success than the first one. All I did was ask, and I never had a chance to present the issue.

Okay, I'm speaking to the second one. It's with respect. . . This time I'll take a different tack; I won't be stupid enough to ask the question next time. This time I'm going to tell you what I think, Mr. Speaker. This is to do with section 358. Now, the Premier has time and again -- and the Minister of the Environment tried it here -- sat here, acted like a pussycat for the first three questions in a series, and then after the last supplemental is asked, we get a deluge of a debate that quite often has nothing to do with the question. He did the same thing today. We got a deluge of what he could have answered earlier to my earlier questions of the advantages of the horse racing commission and why they should be funded rather than schools or . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Get to the question.

MR. TAYLOR: Okay, What I'm getting at here is -- if you would read 358, it says "not raise a matter of policy too large to be dealt with . . ." [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. Excuse me just a moment. Perhaps all parts of the House could just quieten down for a little while so that we could hear the rest of the argument being made, please. Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Okay. With respect to the question, I am referring to the habit that appears to come in -- I've questioned the

Premier often, in spite of the earlier point of order that he's apparently not responsible for any department. But he answers all these questions very simply in the first three, and then in the last one he goes into a matter to debate, when we have no chance to get back.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm getting at is 358 (2). It says:

Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate.

And this is the only time this Premier ever gets out to talk, after the last question is asked. So I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, in the future to draw him up short and get the answer to the last question to be as short as the first three. Mr. Speaker, what I'm getting at is that 358(2) says:

Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate.

And the only time this Premier ever gets out to talk is after the last question's asked. So I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, in the future to draw him up short and get the answer to the last question to be as short as the first three.

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. I submit that the hon. member may have a complaint but that he doesn't have a point of order. Further, Mr. Speaker. I would draw the attention of the House to section 357 of *Beauchesne*, and the very first paragraph.

In putting a question a member must confine himself to the narrowest limits.

In making a question, observations which might lead to debate cannot be regarded as coming within the proper limits of a question.

Mr. Speaker, with respect. I would submit that the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon has failed that test, if it were applied rigorously, on every occasion today, and . . .

MR. TAYLOR: That's not on the point of order.

MR. YOUNG: The hon. member may have a complaint, a complaint that any loser in a debate. I suppose, may want to air, but that's the only problem the hon. member has.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker. I would just like to make one comment on the fact that when a question is being asked, it is genuinely to receive information, and it has been the practice in this House in the many years I've been here that a minister should be afforded the opportunity to provide supplemental information. If we are here to genuinely ask a question to receive information, then I think it's incumbent upon the minister, who may have some additional information, regardless if it's not directly asked of him, to provide that information,

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair appreciates the input from the hon. members who spoke to the purported point of order. Indeed, the tradition of this House has been to allow supplementary information to be given to the House by ministers other than the one to whom the initial question was given. Nevertheless, one should also take into account the complaint as raised by the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, and others privately, with respect to *Beauchesne* 358(2):

Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate.

And indeed, if question period has devolved to be trying to find information, not necessarily just a shouting match or being concerned about how much time is being used -- although there is a

legitimate concern about that, as to how much time is indeed being used up in question period by unnecessary applause perhaps, or the heckling, which is indeed slowing down the process.

Nevertheless, having said this, the Chair would also like to share a little *Beauchesne* with the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, that while the member indeed raises a complaint about the length of an answer, nevertheless we're back . . . [interjection] An answer. Nevertheless, we're caught in a tit for tat situation, if you will, because if you look at *Beauchesne* 359(2):

The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence.

When was the last time there was one carefully drawn sentence in any question in this House? A long preamble and a long question takes an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply. A supplementary question should need no preamble.

So the Chair doesn't see it as a point of order, but indeed sees it as an expression of complaint and frustration, which I'm sure all parts of the House share with respect to both the questions and the answers.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

MR. SPEAKER: Might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

#### head: INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS (reversion)

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce a group of students and teachers from the pivotal centre of southern Alberta, Enchant. They're from the Enchant school, grades 7 and 8. There are 15 students with their teachers Lowell Lefler, Keith Hadden, and Cynthia Brummelhuis. I'd like them to stand and be welcomed here in the capital.

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I would move that certain questions and motions on the Order Paper today stand. First, Question 218 -- and with respect to that question would indicate for hon. members of the Assembly that it is the intention of the minister to discuss the same with the questioner to see if differences may be resolved -- that 219 stand as well, and that Motion 217 stand and retain its place on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

#### 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. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the information the hon. member is looking for is advice that has been provided to the government prior to its making a decision, and as it's not customary to provide that information, I would suggest that all hon. members reject the motion.

MR. SPEAKER: No summation, hon. member? It's been moved. The motion is to . . . [interjection] I'm sorry. The Chair begs the indulgence of the House, but there are three or four other procedural matters that are up here that the Chair is trying to deal with at the same time. Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: A point of order. Mr. Speaker, is the hon. member closing debate in rising a second time?

MR. SPEAKER: The answer is supposedly yes.

[The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rose]

MR. SPEAKER: Will the other member give way? The Chair has already recognized Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. WRIGHT: [Inaudible] while closing debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Could we pause for just half a moment and do a little negotiation rather than get too confrontational too soon? The House is adjourned for a moment. The House is adjourned for five minutes so we can get something straightened out. We have another problem here. Table Officers, please.

[At 3:38 p.m. the House adjourned to 3:43 p.m.]

MR. SPEAKER: Older please. The Chair apologizes to the House. There were just too many balls in the air that I was attempting to juggle at the same time. The Chair recognizes, speaking to Motion 210, Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: I'm obliged, Mr. Speaker. May I just briefly advert to a slightly different but related point of order, which is this. I gather that the customary interpretation of the speaking-twice rule, against speaking twice except in reply on substantive motions and moving a Bill, is that the very act of standing up and saying "I move" counts as speaking. It seems that that is productive of a small injustice in that you don't know at that point in speaking to a motion for a return whether the motion is in fact going to be accepted or not, and therefore unless you are intent on possibly boring everybody, you simply say, "I move Motion so and so, standing on the Order Paper in my name," and then the Government House Leader says, "We don't accept that." Then you've shot your chance to give the reasons in favour.

So I would strongly urge perhaps a reconsideration of the interpretation of that rule or whatever it takes to allow, at least in the case of speaking to motions for returns, the speaker to say "I move it" and it not be counted as speaking to the motion. Because now I don't know the reasons that the mover is going to adduce. Maybe I'm going to say something, and so on. The problems are obvious, and perhaps that could be reconsidered.

Speaking to the motion, Mr. Speaker . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Well now, whoa. Don't go rushing on to the motion. That complicates the process even further. On the point of order purported, the Chair takes it under advisement. The Chair has already had some discussion in process that perhaps we can deal with this, clear up the process for another day.

Now, speaking to the motion, hon. member.

MR. WRIGHT: Mr. Speaker, you may possibly remember that I have asked a number of questions since I've been elected on the matter of the provincial laboratory. It is in a state of turmoil because of radical reconstitution over the last two years. It has moved from being an independent body to being nothing more, really, than an adjunct of the department of medicine at the University of Alberta, albeit still funded by the Department of Community and Occupational Health. In the course of that reorganization, its business has shrunk, and its business has gone proportionately to private medical care -- private laboratories, in fact -- at horrendous expense to the taxpayer, since the provincial laboratory is an economical operation which does not charge by the specimen. It simply employs people to do the job, and hospitals, doctors, health units, and so on can send in specimens free of charge, which is quite different from the regime with the private laboratories, because of course there they pay by the specimen. It doesn't make any difference to them because it's all free anyway as far as they're concerned. It's the taxpayer that gets it in the neck. So it is extremely important and in the public interest, I submit. Mr. Speaker, that these reports that are responsible for this change of regime be available to us and, through us, to the public.

It is a matter for regret, I submit, that my attempts to obtain statements of the comparative costs entailed in the rundown of the provincial laboratory -- the comparison between their costs and the costs we now pay, as taxpayers, to the private laboratories for doing the same work -- have been rebuffed at every turn, that the investigations which the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care and the Minister of Community and Occupational Health have promised us would be made have not, to our knowledge, been made. Perhaps the results of parts or all of those investigations appear from the internal reports which I know have been made.

A further difficulty which perhaps these reports will shed light on, Mr. Speaker, is why the staff of the provincial laboratory has been little involved in the deliberations leading to its change of status. The provincial bacteriologist -- I think that's his official title -- who is the director of the laboratory has been stripped, in small increments, of his duties. He is not now in charge of what was formerly the branch of the provincial laboratory in Calgary. It is now an autonomous and equal laboratory, yet there's only one provincial bacteriologist. That relationship is unclear. We can't get answers. We seek answers. One of the ways is to see the reports, that went, presumably, towards the decision to treat the provincial laboratory in this way, which I call a shabby way, Mr. Speaker, and a way that's done immense disservice to the public of Alberta.

It is little short of scandalous, the way in which the public is now required to pay much, much more for microbiological testing going to the private laboratories than they would for the same specimens being submitted to the provincial laboratory. Just yesterday or today a letter has been received by employees of the provincial laboratory stating that from February onwards there will be no urine testing in the laboratory. This is testing urine for bacterial contamination, important testing. All of this will now go to the private laboratories, so that instead of just being a flat rate, a very economical operation -- \$8 million it costs for this laboratory -- it will go to swell the \$80 million total of fees paid by medicare to the private laboratories.

And we have no answer why this insane course of action is taking place. My submission is that we have a chance to evaluate the reasons, if good reasons there are, for this change of regime if these reports are forthcoming. There are excellent refer-

ences and reports and studies that have been done on several occasions as to the quality of the provincial laboratory and as to the quality of its work and its research. It is also one of the oldest public institutions in the province, having been constituted not long after the formation of the province. I think it was begun in 1907 and has been associated with the University of Alberta since 1912, I believe. Mr. Speaker. To see the way that it has been run down now, in terms of funding and function, and the lowly status to which it's been relegated is a shame -- a shame. And yet we have no answers. The reports that the minister seems to be trying to suppress on what, I submit, is a specious reason -- advice to the minister -- cannot be supported and should not be supported.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wholeheartedly agree with my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona and with the member for Gold Bar, who has brought this motion forward. We on this side of the House just for the life of us cannot figure out why the Minister of Community and Occupational Health, and the minister of hospitals for that matter, have it in for the provincial lab in this province. They've been under continual assault and continual frustration, and yet all the evidence is that they are not only cost-effective in terms of examining specimens and various epidemiological work but that the private lab system, billing Alberta health care insurance plan as it does, does nothing but drive up the cost and drive up the utilization.

Now, maybe we have to wait for the Watanabe Committee to report back to us that this is unacceptable. Perhaps we'll have to find out just how strong the private lab lobby is in this province. I mean, if Dr. Hanson and others in the private lab industry have that much of a say over the Progressive Conservative Party and can lobby that strenuously to close down, as the hon. member has said, an institution which has been in this province and served the people of this province and the medical needs thereof so well over so many years, then we need to know that, because that's just completely unacceptable.

Further unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, is -- I'll have to check the Blues for the exact reason the minister of community health refused this. It seemed he said that it was advice to the minister and therefore not available. Well, he obviously wasn't around in his portfolio in 1977, but the Hon. Helen Hunley was, and she asked for a certain Sir James Howie of Scotland, who was the director of the Public Health Laboratory Service of England and Wales, to come and, at her bidding, to do what but an evaluation of the public lab in this province.

Back in 1977 the report was done by this eminent man, Sir James Howie, and he comes up with nothing but a green light for the provincial lab in everything in terms of its entire operation, both administrative and economic, and finally, in his recommendation in 1977 to the Hon. Helen Hunley, says that he recommends full accreditation and that it continue . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. To deal with the correct procedure, perhaps instead of using Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's name even in this way, as carefully as the member is, one should just refer to the minister of the day. Please, no future references.

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, The point I'm try-

ing to draw is that an evaluation and report was done for the minister of the day, and it is now available and it's public to all. I have been finding it fascinating reading in the light of the accusations and other doubts that have been created around the lab by other quarters. It seems that in 1977, at least, it was given a clean bill of health and a recommendation by a world scholar that it should continue at its present course, which makes it even more ironic, Mr. Speaker, that the minister of community health today has used some reason which the minister in 1977 did not use for releasing it. She seemed to have no problem with releasing it. I don't understand why the minister now does, except that perhaps he's hiding something, but let's have the evidence out. The evidence that is out is this 1977 document and the evidence that we all know in terms of looking at the lab and the people who work there, the people who are continually frustrated by the efforts to try to close it down or do it in.

I have spoken with a number of people, both at the university -- Mr. Brian Caunt and Dr. Gellard -- and others who have been working at the lab for a number of years, and the evidence from the best experts I have over there is that there is just something going on which is not being clearly articulated by the government and by the minister. So it is just unacceptable that we should have the minister use flimsy reasons and excuses for not giving us the real story, giving us the real goods. Certainly under an Alberta New Democrat government this public lab will be in place for all time and in a very cost-effective and proficient way, and we hope to get to government before this minister and his colleagues have a chance to dismantle it totally.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place is what comes to mind. Hon. Government House Leader.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, I want to comment in this debate to some of the debate that's already been given. I commence with the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who clearly, despite the student I know he is of *Beauchesne*, has forgotten citation 392(o), that this falls in the category of internal departmental memoranda. Accordingly, it's advice from staff to the minister. We well know that the reason for that position taken is to assure that staff who are essential in the provision of their advice to ministers for the good administration of the affairs of the province -- that those members should feel able to provide in fullest confidence very complete opinions and evaluations, and obviously that's what this is.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I am surprised that he has in fact in his comments confused a consultant's study, which sometimes are made public and which he has alluded to in his comments, with an internal report. There's a vast difference. It's been discussed here on several occasions since the hon. member was elected. It's unfortunate that he is a slow learner in that respect. So I again draw it to his attention.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if I may have the same leave as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I would observe that if we had a New Democrat government, everything would be run by the government. I mean, that is the philosophy of the government. So I'm not surprised at his conclusion to his debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Calgary-Mountain View and then the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude debate.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that at least we're having some reference made to the citation in *Beauchesne*. At least we're getting some information as to why this government chooses to adopt a very secretive point of view. I would remind the hon. Government House Leader that it is my understanding that this steering committee was made up of individuals that were not employed by the provincial lab, that in fact there were representations from the medical staff at the university. Therefore, I don't see how it could be determined by the government that this is an internal departmental memorandum, given that the makeup of the steering committee comes from individuals who were outside the employ of the provincial lab or of the government.

So I reject that the government is adopting the correct citation under *Beauchesne* because it was not an internal departmental memorandum, and it's simply an excuse to prevent the public from knowing the results of that study. You know, I pick up the paper -- every so often there are these big ads, your open government. Well, quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. These kinds of decisions and these kinds of excuses that are being brought into the Legislature clearly underscore the fact that this is anything but an open government.

Mr. Speaker, I just reject the arguments put forward by the hon. House leader and the minister as being the real reasons for rejecting this motion for a return.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

DR. CASSIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that the provincial lab will remain open to service the health units and those other requirements of government. I appreciate that the report by the Member for Edmonton-Centre is 10 years old at this point in time.

I also have some questions with the statement that the provincial lab is able to provide these services for a fee less than the private lab. I have some difficulty understanding how the provincial lab is able to do that, unless they disregard their capital cost and some of the infrastructure that is put there by the government and they're dealing with wages and reagents only. I think one of the figures we had quoted questioned whether it even included the cost of postage.

At one time I used the provincial lab, but I stopped using the provincial lab for two very simple reasons: service and time. If I have an individual who has a problem and has a concern, they continue to be concerned until they have a report back. And because of the lengthy time and delays that I as a practitioner experienced with the provincial lab, I stopped using it. Quite simply, it's a matter of service and really being on top of the job and the requirement.

I also understand that there is, at this point in time, a very good relationship between the Foothills hospital, which deals with the requirements of the provincial lab for southern Alberta, and the University of Alberta, that deals with the requirements in northern Alberta. I don't see that we should be increasing the size or maintaining a service beyond its limited requirements, which are the requirements of the government.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar summing up.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to offer a word of reassurance to the hon. House leader and his

anxiety about a change of government. The hon. House leader need not despair. There is hope. There is a third alternative, and I'd be happy to discuss that matter with him at any point.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really curious about the minister's response to this question and about why he declines to make this report public. It is, as has been stated, not a report of staff. This is a report commissioned by the government. In fact, it's one of several reports that the minister has asked for by a third party on the Provincial Laboratory of Public Health. The fact of the matter is that this appears to me and to people who ask about it to be a game of hide-and-seek. My thoughts go along the lines of that song, "What's it all about, Alfie?" What's it all about? Because the provincial lab is now operating in an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty, and I don't think that's any service to the employees at the lab, to the people who are dependent upon the lab for testing, or to the citizens of Alberta who are the taxpayers who pay for the lab.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that at this point in time, without any reference to the reports that have been done about whether or not those reports state that the work can be done better, that the work can be done more effectively, that there will be greater accuracy or less cost -- none of those facts have come out, but in fact changes have been made in how the provincial laboratory is now operating. Instead of one lab, as we've known and had for years, we now have two, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary. Perhaps it's done for efficiency. I would like to see the data to show me precisely how that works. We now have two labs. There is one in Edmonton. The lab previously was responsible or accountable to a provincial board of health. That no longer is the line of reasoning. Now we have one lab, the one in the north end of the province, responsible to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Alberta, and the one in the south of the province to the Foothills hospital.

An interesting dichotomy, a difference in approach, a difference in accountability, Mr. Speaker. We don't know why. No one has been given an explanation. It is in fact a very murky area. The director of the provincial lab in Edmonton has communicated with his staff and with others to indicate that he has never been consulted in the matter and that in his view the actions are not justified. There is no question that the morale at the lab is very low. The budget to the lab has been cut by 15 percent. We will see a reduction in the number of staff. Everything in what is occurring, mysterious as it remains, has never been explained to the people who are on the front line, the gatekeepers in the lab.

Well, why do we need it anyway? I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Alberta have a right to a public laboratory of health, that they have a right to it and to it retaining its objectivity and retaining its capacity to provide low-cost testing.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, we don't know what the original study recommended. It doesn't seem ever to have surfaced. A second study now under way or just completed probably won't surface either. So no one -- not the staff, not the users, not the consumers, not the public -- none of us know why these actions have been taken. We don't know whether the first study was acted on. We have no idea what on earth has occasioned this rather peremptory action on the part of the minister. Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that these decisions are arbitrary, that they have never been explained to anyone's satisfaction that I know of, and I believe we have a right to understand clearly, unequivocally, from the minister that the decisions he has taken in this regard are in the best interests of Albertans and are rational in the sense of being cost-effective and accuracy-effective

in the testing that is required now and will continue to be required.

Mr. Speaker, just finally, I fail to understand why the secrecy. But that should come as no surprise to you, sir, or to anyone else, because we've been treated to a series of these stonewalling answers to requests for information and this is yet another one on the list.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion lost]

216. Mr. Sigurdson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of those people in unions, identified by personal name and the name of the union of which they are a member, whose "advice and counsel" was sought by the Minister of Community and Occupational Health, as noted at page 1859 of *Alberta Hansard*, June 12, 1987, regarding a "20 percent increase in the cost of claims with a zero percent increase in the numbers of claims" prior to his giving the board "the proper direction" in this matter.

MR. SIGURDSON: Having had some experience with moving previous motions for returns, Mr. Speaker, I know that I should speak to it now, because I want to get in a little bit now so the minister can respond, probably tell me no, and then I'll be able to stand up again and ask him, "Why not?" Anyway, let's go back. I've got a half hour. [interjection] Oh, there's the minister of career development telling me to show some optimism. I've got one for you next week, just coming on today's Order Paper. Don't worry about it; I've missed you too.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back a little bit to June 12 when what I heard in the Legislature caused me to put this motion for a return on the Order Paper. The Leader of the Opposition asked the Minister of Community and Occupational Health some questions about the Workers' Compensation Board and whether or not we would have a public study, a public inquiry into a couple of matters at that time. Now, the minister then said, in response to a question as to whether or not he had unilaterally told the Workers' Compensation Board to cut back the amount of money and the amount of time workers were on compensation, and I'll quote:

Because, Mr. Speaker, I sought the advice and the counsel of my colleagues in government as well as a number of people in unions and in industry throughout the province. Those people were expressing concern to me. I saw the numbers, recommended to my colleagues that we take action, and we have done exactly that.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Well, I don't know, Mr. Speaker. I didn't think a lot of people read *Hansard*, but I guess a fair number, when they're suffering from insomnia, happen to pick up the book and go through Oral Question Period late at night, trying to doze off. A couple of them came upon the response that the minister had given the Leader of the Opposition, and a couple of them were leaders of a number of unions in our province. They asked, "Who was it?" You know, we sit in the Legislature. Surely the minister would have shared with us who it was that he had discussed this concern with. Who in the trade union movement? So we put the motion on the Order Paper just to ask the name of the union which they remember whose advice and whose counsel was sought by the Minister of Community and Occupational

Health.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's what you're doing.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's what I'm doing, thank you. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. SIGURDSON: Mr. Speaker, you have a rather unenviable task in trying to keep some members in line. I know that. . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. Will the hon. member stick to the debate.

MR. SIGURDSON: Absolutely. I was hoping that you would allow me the same latitude as you allowed the Member for Banff-Cochrane, now the hon. minister.

Mr. Speaker, I know full well that the Minister of Community and Occupational Health is going to take the opportunity in the next 30 seconds or so and stand up and provide me with the information I want. I know he's not going to follow the example that has been set by the Minister of Career Development and Employment in the past, for he's turned down every single one of my motions for returns. I will now afford the minister that opportunity to do that.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to the hon. member just exactly what my response will be. But I must say that despite his eloquence, I am unable to accept his motion or support his motion and therefore would recommend to all members that it be rejected. Because in the course of my duties -- as I'm sure it's true with all hon. members -- we have the benefit of talking to a lot of Albertans, many of whom give us some very sound and very good advice. And I rely on that. I rely on a lot of that good advice from my constituents in Calgary-Shaw, from members of trade unions, and from employers and all Albertans. Without that, I don't think we'd do as good a job as this government is doing today.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that it would serve no useful purpose for me to tell you the individuals' names; in fact, I think I would be doing a disservice to those people. But they, in addition to officials within the Department of Community and Occupational Health, officials at the Workers' Compensation Board, and others, gave me that advice prior to June and prior to the November 12, 1986, letter which I sent to the chairman of the Workers' Compensation Board.

I'll go back briefly to that letter, Mr. Speaker, and reflect on the actual results, because our projections back in November '86 proved to be true. The numbers of claims submitted by injured workers, people hurt on the job, injured on the job in this province, did not increase in 1986 over the year 1985. In fact, some 20 percent increase was found in the cost of those claims, the dollar costs associated with those claims, and I -- I think quite properly, quite responsibly -- said to the chairman of the Workers' Compensation Board, "I'm concerned and we as a government are concerned that perhaps those costs are out of control and, in fact, perhaps the Workers' Compensation Board is going beyond its mandate of providing benefits to those injured workers who are truly entitled to them." Because all members will agree -- I'm sure even my hon. colleague opposite would agree -- that it is not the mandate of the board to be a social service agency, nor is it to be an Unemployment Insurance

Commission replacement. We have two excellent agencies who provide those benefits. Instead, the board must provide benefits and assist to rehabilitate workers up to that level to which they're entitled.

Now, there have been a number of discussions; there's been a lot of debate about the board in the last few days. I won't get into that in detail. Perhaps I would invite the hon. member who submitted Motion for a Return 210 to reintroduce the matter as a motion to be debated on the Order Paper. I would invite the hon. member to do the same thing with the Workers' Compensation Board. I think it would be a very valuable debate, especially after the report of the consultants is released early in 1988. I think it would be a very timely debate in this Legislature in the spring 1988 session.

Let me just touch briefly on the work that's being done by adjudicators today. They are, I believe, a very talented, dedicated group of people working in all levels of the board.

MS BARRETT: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is that under the relevancy rule, I wonder if we can determine just what the current activities of the Workers' Compensation have to do with the reason that the minister is not prepared to cough up the information required.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the hon member referring to 299 or Standing Order 23? Nonetheless, the point is well taken. Hon. Minister of Community and Occupational Health, it's been drawn to the attention of the Chair that debate must be limited to motion 216.

MR. DINNING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will complete my remarks, but before doing so, I want to laud the efforts of the very dedicated and talented staff within the Workers' Compensation Board who are indeed working under a great deal of pressure. But the board must continue to operate in a humane fashion, in a sensitive and fair manner. I have noted publicly in the days past that in a few cases where injured workers have come to my attention, a few have perhaps not been dealt with in that fair and humane fashion that all of us in this Assembly would want the Workers' Compensation Board to be looking at those injured workers with. I've brought that to the attention of the board.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to the motion quite directly and say again that I am not able to support the motion. In fact, I would recommend to all of my colleagues that it be rejected.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just looked in *Beauchesne*, and I understand that the word "drivel" is not unparliamentary. I hope the minister doesn't mind if I state in my observation that his comments amount to no more than drivel with respect to an excuse as to why he won't provide the information. I suspect the reason he won't provide the information is because he learned his lesson about loose lips and phony excuses and false statements after he made the claim that union people had advised him to go out and cut the funding of the Workers' Compensation Board for support of injured workers by 20 percent. I note that this government, this minister, has no problem interfering with the workings of a board. . .

MR. DAY: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of order, Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: I will follow procedure, Mr. Speaker, when calling a point of order and refer to the citation -- it's number 23 in our Standing Orders -- that the member should not be discussing matters other than those under discussion, I think. I fail to see the relevance of her remarks.

MR. SIGURDSON: Point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of order, Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: On that point of order, Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised that the Member for Red Deer-North can't figure out how the Member for Edmonton-Highlands' discussion is relevant. Because it is entirely relevant. What we had asked was: who were the union members that were contacted? That's all that we've asked; that's what the member is addressing. It's regretful that the Member for Red Deer-North has just forgotten to read the original motion.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair appreciates both points of order. Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands continue.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will happily continue. I don't believe the minister actually heard from members of unions that he should arbitrarily and without consultation, on a broad scale, go out and cut the budget for funding injured workers' support after they've been injured by 20 percent. I find that hard to believe. I suspect that the reason the minister won't cough up the information is because it didn't happen the way he says it happened, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise, he'd do the honourable thing and stand up and give us the information.

Now, I note that this minister figures he can run interference with the board and its funding, telling them how to spend or how much to spend or where they spend it. But for 10 years we've had troubles in the financial industry in Alberta and the government says, "Oh, well." They cover their eyes. "Things are okay; don't worry about it." Well, Mr. Speaker, which is the case with this government? Do elected members have to sit here and listen to made-up stories by ministers who in no other sense can defend their arbitrary cuts to needed human services and not even have them cough up the so-called evidence?

When this minister didn't bother coming to my constituency office in Edmonton-Highlands after I invited him in writing -- because I wanted him to see the state of what's going on in that constituency -- I was disappointed, because I know that the people that come to my constituency office don't support the position of this government, which was to arbitrarily cut by 20 percent the fund which supports injured workers, workers who got injured on their job. Now, the minister says, "Don't mistake us for a social service agency." You've got that right, Mr. Minister. There's no mistake about it. No one is assuming yours is a social service agency. What yours is is an insurance pool that is there for the benefit of workers who become injured on the job, of which there are about 60,000 a year, and those are only the accepted claims, Mr. Speaker.

Then there's more than that. How about the deaths that occur on the job every year? I think the minister made up his comments about those people in unions which gave him advice and counsel to do this sort of thing, and if he had any guts or

any honour at all he'd stand up and give us the names, give us the unions. He didn't even go out and talk to the unions, and we know it.

MR. DAY: Point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of order. Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has referred to the minister making up information, and Beauchesne 320 refers to, in terms of being unparliamentary, things like "lies," "not telling the truth," "false," "false statements," "deliberate falsehoods," and I think that easily falls underneath what this member opposite is suggesting. I would like to see those comments withdrawn.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Highlands, on the point of order.

MS BARRETT: No, not on the point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair will take that as notice. Continue, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: No, it's done, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WRIGHT: On the point of order.

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

MR. WRIGHT: Santa Claus makes up a list every Christmas. He's not out of order.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to argue on behalf of Motion for a Return 216, because like my colleagues, I am very fascinated to find out who it is in the union movement who's been advising the minister to make cuts and to make things a whole lot tougher for the injured workers in this province. Because in a vein similar to my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands, I wrote to the minister. I said: "At any time, any place -- I know you're a busy man - my constituents and I would like to meet with you, to talk to you and give you some valuable input. People have been having problems with the system, people who could make some suggestions for improvement." The message that comes back says, "Well, I'll meet with you, but no constituents." So we had a meeting, but I can't say, unfortunately, that it was particularly productive, and I still had all these constituents who wanted to make sure they were treated with just a little bit of decency and dignity and humanity.

They got together and decided to come down here and try to put their case directly to the minister himself, and I'm glad he met with those people finally. I don't know why he wouldn't do it up front initially, the polite way, but eventually he did meet with them. I was glad to hear that he's proposing some sort of public hearing process where injured workers will have an opportunity to make their suggestions for improvement, because there's no question about it to anybody who cares to even read the newspapers, and certainly any MLA in this House is getting the same kind of complaints all of my colleagues on this side certainly are. It's one of the areas that's taking up more time than anything else in our constituency offices.

So here we come to the motion again, Mr. Speaker, the ad-

vice and counsel that was given to the minister. I'd like to know just who that is, because I've talked to a lot of people in the trade union movement and I haven't run into any who've told me that we've got to tighten up on the Workers' Compensation Board. In fact, the minister himself knows that the premiums employers are paying on behalf of their employees have not been raised in years, so if there's a financial problem, maybe it's the same sort of problem the Minister of Labour seems to have in wringing his hands about raising the minimum wage. It's now seven years on that, and it's been just about as many on the last time the premiums for workers' compensation . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair hesitates to interrupt the hon. member. Under Standing Order 8, time for this item of business has expired. Next order, please.

head: **PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS**  
**OTHER THAN**  
**GOVERNMENT BILLS AND ORDERS**  
**(Second Reading)**

**Bill 206**  
**Public Ambulance Act**

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pride that I rise in this Assembly to introduce second reading of Bill 206, the Public Ambulance Act.

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has been introduced by other New Democrats before me in this Assembly, namely by Mr. Martin in 1983 as Bill 211, again by Mr. Martin in 1984 as Bill 220, by Mr. Jim Gurnett in 1985 as Bill 240, and just last year by the Reverend William Roberts as Bill 224. So, Mr. Speaker, it's with great pride that I reintroduce this Bill into the Assembly and tell this group of Conservatives on the other side that they are slow learners but we are persistent, and we will win in the long run. We will get a provincewide ambulance system.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will ensure the setting and enforcement of uniform and adequate standards of training for personnel, equipment, communications, and other essentials of a good ambulance service provincewide. As well, the Bill will establish the framework within which the minister responsible could enter into agreements for the provision of ambulance services anywhere in the province.

Mr. Speaker, we in this party see a quality provincewide ambulance system as an important cornerstone of an effective health care system. This government has for too long denied the need for a provincewide, efficient, effective, emergency ambulance system. When the Lieutenant Governor was reading the Speech from the Throne for the start of this session last spring, I am sure she was reminded that it was she as Minister of Social Services and Community Health in September, 1975, who received the report of a task force on highway accidents, which recommended, among other things:

the establishment of a provincewide, 24 hours ambulance system . . . planned, organized and co-ordinated at the provincial level . . . (with) minimum standards for ambulances . . . (and) training programs for personnel.

So this idea has been around for a long time. I know a former

member of this Assembly, Mr. Grant Notley, was strongly in favour of that.

That wasn't the last study or recommendation this government ignored, however. A member who is now the Deputy Premier and was at that time the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care, received on April 1, 1980, a ground ambulance study discussion paper from his department's emergency services branch, which noted in its very first paragraph:

The present ground ambulance service in Alberta is fragmented and unco-ordinated in terms of specific legislation, training of attendants, level of service being provided and grant subsidies.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government knew that the ambulance system of this province was in a mess for many years and have done nothing about it. This Bill gives them the chance to do something about it. Surely it's time that we reduced the needless deaths and permanent injuries in our province, and it's time that we did it in a manner that would reduce health care costs. This Bill will help to achieve those aims.

We now have another study, the Schumacher study. I hope that it's not just duplicating the ground already covered. I hope that this study is gathering information that will be useful in setting up and co-ordinating a provincewide ambulance system, that he's not just studying the need for an ambulance system, which has already been well demonstrated and argued many times in this Assembly from the New Democratic Party perspective. I hope that this government is finally now committed to such a system, and that the Schumacher study is one of the steps on the road to such a system, not another stalling tactic.

Mr. Speaker, I do not set myself up as an expert on all the details that must go into setting up such a system. I would, however, outline a few basic points that I think are essential to make for a cost-efficient but effective system. These include an ambulance system that trains its employees at least to the minimum level of emergency medical technician or to the level of paramedics. The system should also provide ready access to the expertise of medical doctors throughout the province, either through phones or radios.

Mr. Speaker, the system must include emergency transportation of the injured or ill and it must be co-ordinated with the local and regional levels of care available in hospitals, because we do not believe that we just want an expensive flying doctor system that brings somebody from High Level with a simple fracture all the way down to a big-city hospital in Edmonton. We're not looking for that kind of Cadillac system.

It would also make sense, Mr. Speaker, to review the levels of care available in all the local, regional, and the big-city hospitals and the level of communication between those hospitals, so that unnecessary costs and duplications are avoided and so that the ambulance system can plug into the most effective level to deal with their particular problem at a particular time.

We must remember, of course, that the main purpose of such an ambulance system is to save lives and to provide immediate emergency service to people that need it. And so while we want to be as cost-effective and efficient as possible in doing that, we must not forget the primary purpose and maybe become too efficient or, on the other hand, decide that we want too much of a Cadillac kind of service, particularly if it's one that becomes too bureaucratic and doesn't really work too well. So we must strike a balance then, between efficiency and effectiveness.

Mr. Speaker, leaving the ambulance system to the local authorities is just no longer acceptable in this province. The day when ambulance personnel have to go to do another job and are



hard to find when the emergency occurs, as has sometimes happened in some of our rural systems in recent times, is no longer acceptable. It's also no longer acceptable to just leave the ambulance system to people with St. John Ambulance certificates and training and rely on volunteers to provide services that the province should provide. The people of Alberta deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, like the seat belt legislation, this idea is not one whose time has come; it is one whose time is long overdue. I urge all members in this Assembly to support this Bill.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway was rather brief in introducing his Bill. I guess that is a function of the Bill itself, which is rather brief and really doesn't contain very much. I would have thought. . .

MR. McEACHERN: Enough.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Well, it depends. Enough for what? I would have thought that the New Democratic Party would have used this proposed legislation as a method of explaining to Albertans what the party felt should be provided for Albertans. And it certainly doesn't do that.

As the hon. member pointed out, about the only thing that it does is provide for the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care to enter into contracts for an ambulance service at various spots in the province and to license ambulance services. It doesn't say anything about levels of service, although, with all respect to my hon. friend from Kingsway, he did say that the level of service was to be either emergency medical technician ambulance or emergency medical technician paramedic. I would suggest to hon. members that there is quite a bit of difference in those two levels of service, and he really in effect didn't say what the New Democratic Party felt should be the appropriate level of service in this province.

I think hon. members should be aware of the fact that Alberta -- while it has not adopted a single comprehensive ambulance Bill or Act -- has, through many pieces of legislation, allowed for the delivery of a very good ambulance service to a very large number of people in this province. I think it's recognized that 80 percent of our population receive as good ambulance service as anywhere in the country. But I admit, and the government certainly has recognized, that 80 percent is not good enough and that there are going to be improvements for the remaining 20 percent. The rationale behind that is that for those who do live in Calgary and Edmonton . . . I suppose Calgary has the most expensive and certainly has, I guess, the second most expensive ambulance service of any jurisdiction in North America. Whether it is the second best or the best, I think it's recognized that the city of Calgary provides a very high level of ambulance service, although the citizens of Calgary are paying quite a price for it. The city of Edmonton also provides a good service

MR. McEACHERN: Yes. [inaudible] service. It's holding seniors to ransom.

MR. SCHUMACHER: I beg your pardon? I don't know what that comment referred to. He said something about the city of Edmonton holding its senior citizens to ransom.

MR. McEACHERN: For \$4, because this government won't pay.

MR. SCHUMACHER: I didn't hear the hon. member say what he felt should be the user charge for ambulance service in this province under the benign administration of the New Democrats. I suppose a person would have to go to look at a New Democrat province or a province that is operating a system designed and implemented by the New Democrats to find out what they would do. I believe there are user fees in the province of Manitoba, and I certainly know there are user fees in the province of British Columbia, which is operating under an ambulance system designed and implemented by the former Barrett government. So I don't know, I didn't hear him say. Perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Centre, when he takes the floor, will provide many more details. But I don't believe that this province has anything to be ashamed of in the amount of money it contributes to the provision of ambulance service when you compare it with what happens in other jurisdictions.

The reference was made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway about training of personnel. That is one area where this province has been a leader in the whole country. We have trained or can train or will train, according to demand, more emergency medical technicians than any other jurisdiction in the country. We have three institutions that do that. The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the Alberta Vocational Centre all provide training for emergency medical technicians. In many respects that's sort of a foreign-aid program for us, because we in fact train a lot of personnel for other provinces in our institutions. We certainly have been a leader in that area. The province of Ontario doesn't even have these courses going on on a continuing basis; they only do them as they're needed. In the province of British Columbia, in the Justice Institute there, they only do them as needed by their own systems.

So the province has demonstrated a real commitment to the providing of well-trained personnel for emergency medical services, and as has been pointed out, we are going to extend that commitment by attempting to bring a better program that will make better use of the moneys presently expended.

In addition to the land ambulance situation, the province does fund entirely the air ambulance situation in the province. That is not a matter of local jurisdiction. Notwithstanding the fact that there have been no imposed minimum standards our province has -- as I said, 80 percent of it is covered by at least basic life support and, of course, the city of Calgary is advanced life support.

The committee that I have the honour to chair has been working since last February in an attempt to design a better system, and I can assure my hon. friend that it is not studying the need for a better system. We acknowledge the fact that the system is not perfect and can be improved, and that's what we're working on. In the near future, we hope to be able to place in the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care's hands a reasonable, practical report that will result in a system that will cover our entire province with a good ambulance system.

In that process, the committee held public hearings in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, in Grande Prairie, High Level, St. Paul, Red Deer, Coronation, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. I believe those were the major centres. And in the course of those hearings, the thing we heard most was that it should not be left to the municipalities to decide what level of service, if any level of service, should be provided to the citizens; that there should be a minimum level of service mandated by the province.

We also heard that it was confusing not to have all elements of the service combined in one piece of legislation. We also

heard that there were inefficiencies in the use of equipment; that ambulances could be used in a manner that didn't allow or didn't encourage them to travel one way empty, or to carry one person when two could go if there was proper use of the equipment and the equipment could carry two people.

As I pointed out, the province does fund air ambulance services completely. We do pay \$36 million a year for the provision of ambulance services. That's \$15 per capita, and compares favourably with, I believe, the province of British Columbia, which does have its own system based in Victoria and which is so integrated that they even assemble their own ambulances in their own plant, which, I guess, is a throwback to the philosophy of the government that implemented the program. Their per capita figure of support is \$19 a head.

It's interesting to note that our neighbouring provinces, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have also recently become involved in this area. Legislation was put in to effect in Saskatchewan in 1986 and an ambulance Act was passed by the Manitoba Legislature in 1986 that year too, but I don't believe it has been fully implemented. So while we as a province are the only province west of Ontario that doesn't have a consolidated ambulance Act, I think I can assure all hon. members that that situation will not pertain very long, and in fact we won't be last by very much when you consider that it was 1986 when Saskatchewan and Manitoba did the same thing in their provinces. [interjection] I beg your pardon?

MR. SIGURDSON: It's still the best in the world.

MR. SCHUMACHER: But, Mr. Speaker, I just want to assure all members of the Assembly that Alberta has not forgotten the needs of its citizens in the area of ambulance service, that we will continue to support it in a very generous manner, as we have done, and that we will, in fact, correct many of the problems that we found in asking Albertans what they felt should be provided to them. And I hope that the Member for Edmonton-Centre, when he does get recognized, would really tell Albertans what the New Democrats would do if they had the opportunity of doing it, because certainly this piece of legislation before us doesn't tell us anything. Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased to have heard the Member for Drumheller's brief description of the hearings that he's had throughout the province at the behest of the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care and in his defence of this government's utter lack of initiative in the areas of comprehensive ambulance service and co-ordination of ambulance service and, of course, establishing at a provincial level the minimum standards that must be employed by the ambulance industry. It would, under a New Democrat government in Alberta, be that of an EMTA, but we would hope, in continuing the tradition of the fine educational system that is in the province, that some more paramedics would also be trained and also be paid at a level commensurate with their education and their skills.

But the point I think we really have to make, Mr. Speaker, is that if the ambulances of this province were to go as slow as the government has in terms of this issue, then most patients would probably be dead on arrival at a hospital, because there's no question that this government has moved along in a lumbering

fashion. Poor Mr. Tudge in the department there -- I don't know what support he's had, sitting there with ambulance evaluation and standards and so on. I've heard from people that he has tried to move the government along in this fashion many times before this and has been unsuccessful in his initiatives. We're pleased that the current Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care has finally taken the bull by the horns and the dinosaurs from Drumheller -- no, I'm sorry, the Member for Drumheller -- and moved it along to get to the point where we're now on the verge of seeing not only the recommendations of his public hearings, but how it will in fact resolve itself in the legislation.

And I will be honest and apologetic for the fact that I agree with the Member for Drumheller, that Bill 206 certainly is not adequate in terms of the fullness of what the whole system needs to be about and what it should be about. Obviously, though, we're not foolish in the opposition, Mr. Speaker, realizing that our private member's Bills are there to continue to prompt the government to action and not to fill out the whole piece, though perhaps it could have been better. We are however working on a mental health Act that would be far more comprehensive and more satisfactory than the one that's currently before us, but we'll see when we get to that point. As I was saying, the minimum standards in the province is, I guess, one of the basic issues. We will be very pleased that we will finally have from the Member for Drumheller and the government that the minimum standard for those in ambulances be an EMTA level.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

My brother-in-law, who is an orthopedic surgeon, was one of those docs that went off to Saudi Arabia to make U.S. dollars hand over fist as an orthopedic surgeon in Saudi Arabia. He said to me, when he came back to Alberta -- he's now at the Mayo Clinic -- that the ambulance service in Alberta reminds him of that which exists in Saudi Arabia, where they have beautiful hospital facilities, state-of-the-art equipment, and all kinds of medical and health care people in the institutions but in the streets of Saudi Arabia there's no ambulance system at all, because it seemed to be the will of Allah. If someone gets into an accident or falls sick on the street or something they're just left there, because it's the will of Allah. There is in fact no ambulance system to bring them into the state-of-the-art facilities that they have, and he as a physician really thought it was bad for business not to have a good ambulance system to bring them into the hospitals that they have, and that in fact here in Alberta the same situation is true; that many people do not receive the prehospital emergency care which they need and to get to the state-of-the-art hospital facilities which we have so they can be cared for, and that in fact a person enters the health care system when they are first touched by a paramedic from an ambulance.

It's interesting too -- and I think all members of the Assembly might agree with me on this -- that the Canada Health Act itself is somewhat inadequate in this regard. As I understand it, ambulance services or emergency care is not defined somehow, under the Canada Health Act, as being medically required. It has left the whole question of what we do with people outside the hospitals, who need the care, open to various provinces to do with it what they want, or various municipalities to do with it what they want. Unlike the strong tones of the rest of the Canada Health Act, it has somehow, ironically, left out emergency care as being medically required. I would think that perhaps we could at some point try to nudge our fellow repre-

sentatives to amend the Canada Health Act so that ambulance services would in fact fall under the Canada Health Act and that we need to deal with it as part of the entire health care system.

So what we have is a system that is run by a number of well-meaning and often fiscally strapped municipalities and by some towns and regions of the province where there are some very concerned people who give a lot of their time and effort to provide their services through volunteer ambulance services, as well as some private operators which are in the province. So we have, Mr. Speaker, a complete patchwork of different levels of service and different kinds of service and different administrations of service.

What this really amounts to, in the final analysis, is problems in the billing system. I would hope that in the recommendations that are forthcoming and the legislation thereto some attention would be paid to how people bill for ambulance service in the province. We have, as has been mentioned, currently in the city of Edmonton this gross unfairness to our senior citizens, who for a \$4 fee are being forced by the Edmonton Ambulance Authority to have to pay the entire cost out of pocket -- some up to \$270 if they were to go to and from hospital -- and that they will not be able to recover it until they have paid it fully, and then be reimbursed. This unfairness to the senior citizens of this province, though I think exacerbated by the Edmonton Ambulance Authority, must fall finally at the feet of the province who is the prime funder of emergency medical care and must deal with this situation and resolve it. And to streamline and to make more clear just how the billing and the funding proceed would, in fact, alleviate the unfairness to many senior citizens right here in the province, in the city of Edmonton.

The air ambulance system currently in the province of Alberta is another conundrum, aside from the billing problems. As we've noted, if you're in a car accident in Hinton, one member in the car can be flown to Edmonton for services, and the government would pay for that, and the other member in the vehicle would be driven by ground ambulance to Edmonton and would have to pay themselves for the ground ambulance system. It seems to totally bring to relief the total contradiction in how the system is currently operating. Again, if we're going to properly co-ordinate and integrate the service, then this kind of discrepancy between ground and air services must be ameliorated.

Perhaps that is what we are going to get with a better dispatch system. I haven't heard the member, I don't believe, talk about how he is going to regulate and propose proper dispatch of ambulances, though he did allude to some ambulances being sent out to one situation and then coming back empty when in fact they could be meeting the need of an emergency case quite close to where they are. If there were a central 911 number in the province, the ambulance closest to the scene of the accident or the emergency could be dispatched, because we would know more clearly where the various vehicles were in the province, and they could get to the scene where they're most needed through a much more streamlined dispatch system. That certainly would be in place for the air services as well. A service could be dispatched either by helicopter or fixed-wing in an appropriate way. Decisions would be made by the physicians, who would call in the order, and the dispatcher would know what's available to be sent out. This I think is a key element in anything that's going to be forthcoming that's going to get at some of the root problems in the current ad hoc system which we have.

It's been a learning to me, Mr. Speaker, that a great deal of the work of ambulances is -- we understand it to be in emer-

gency care. Ambulances in fact do much of the work of transferring patients between health facilities, between hospitals or nursing homes or whatever. Again, the city of Calgary, I think, has been a leader in bringing together various resources for how to best co-ordinate and fund the transfer of patients between facilities. I wish that we could have a better one here in Edmonton, and I know that district 24 and others are looking at how to try to do that. But again, Mr. Speaker, it really falls to the province, which is the prime funder here, to help the municipalities and help the system to develop comprehensive and economic ways of developing the transfer system of patients between hospitals. Unless that's forthcoming, then whatever we are left with will be inadequate.

Then we get to who, I feel, is a tremendous ally in terms of vastly improved ambulance standards, co-ordination, and funding, being the Alberta Medical Association. I'm very pleased as a New Democrat that we stand together with the Alberta Medical Association on this issue and really now want to challenge the government, challenge the Member for Drumheller, the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care, and others responsible for the system throughout the province. The recommendations that we make as New Democrats fall almost entirely into the same recommendations as the Alberta Medical Association has made and, I might add again, Mr. Speaker, has made over and over and over again. But the recommendations, as I understand it from the A.M.A., are the legislation covering minimum standards, the 911 number, a medical services advisory committee, and also something I think we sorely lack, which is getting some data on what's really going on out there and so establishing a comprehensive data collection base for just what is going on out in the field so that we have some statistical way of analyzing it and improving it over time.

What the A.M.A., I believe, goes on to recommend, which I'm pleased to say that we in the Official Opposition are also recommending, is that the province entirely fund and operate the ambulance system throughout the province. Now, I'm sure that will not be in the Member for Drumheller's recommendations, and this government will continue to leave it in fragmented hands, when in fact economies of scale and streamlining of the dispatch system and the funding and everything could be made a lot more clear for people and operators and the governments if it were an Alberta ambulance system which anyone could have access to who had an Alberta health care insurance number. Services by an ambulance would be billed as a benefit under the Alberta health care insurance plan. It seems to me that as a medically required service and as a recommendation from the A.M.A. and as experienced in the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario, we will then not be able to sit here in the province of Alberta boasting of the best health care system in the world if we do not have a system that is similar in that respect, that is provincially funded and provincially operated.

Now, I know that that will cause great consternation. It has some problems with a lot of people and is perhaps too large a step to take. I think, though, that we need to look at that proposal seriously. It would have enormous advantages that would outweigh the disadvantages. Anyone in this day and age could clearly see the benefits of having ambulance service covered as a benefit under the Alberta health care insurance plan and the benefits of the province not only setting the standards but setting the funding which is going to help to meet those standards and the equipment and the vehicles which are going to have to deliver those standards and so on. So when we begin to get into setting the standards, then we necessarily get into the core fund-

ing for the system.

I think that is the only way, in the final analysis, to go. As I say, I'm pleased as a New Democrat to be standing with the AMA on that position and want to challenge the Member for Drumheller and the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care and Mr. Tudge and everyone else responsible for this integral area of health care. We don't need just to bring it together in a comprehensive way but need to give it some core funding and get it off the ground in a way that's going to be for the better health care of all Albertans, save costs in the hospital sector as well, and then finally be able to boast that we do in fact have the best health care system in the world at all levels.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 206, the Public Ambulance Act. There's no question about the need for qualified, standardized ambulance service in our province. In my mind it's absolutely indigenous to a health care system. I believe the astonishing fact is that in a province as geographically constructed as ours is, we've managed to survive as long as we have without it. Perhaps that's not a good choice of terms, because some of us have not survived.

The Member for Clover Bar just mentioned to me that he thought we should take note of who in fact in his memory first introduced a resolution in this regard, which was passed, he remembers, in 1972. Now, of course that's a little bit before my time, but he indicated to me that it was passed in this House, a resolution to study and put in place an ambulance service. Here we are 15 years later still reviewing and debating it.

With regret, however, Mr. Speaker, while I recognize the need for an effective service, I find this Bill deficient, so have difficulty supporting it. The deficiencies lie in the scope of the Bill, which in my view is too narrow, as it really only addresses standards and licensing, a few administrative details, and a mention of the need for communication. I believe the breadth of the Bill is not deep enough by any means. The standards are recognized as necessary, but the Bill does not outline what standards are required. I find it quite vague in that regard and others, I also believe that the Bill provides a vast amount of authority to the minister, which covers not only the standards that are to be required but also a number of other elements that I see as being not the correct move at this point in time. If we're going to have a quality ambulance service in this province, as we need, Mr. Speaker, let's get it right; let's do it right.

The Liberal opposition has outlined a set of recommendations in recent months which cover not only standards for an ambulance service but also a number of other elements. These we're reviewing with various groups of the public throughout the province over the next few months, and hopefully we'll have available in the next session of the Legislature a private member's Bill.

Mr. Speaker, in our opinion, an ambulance service should have a governing body, and that governing body should oversee the ambulance operators of all types -- public, private, whatever -- in the province. That governing body would set up and update provincial standards, issue licences, grant moneys, monitor and control the performance, discipline, and would provide the interface with the government and ambulance operators. We further believe that the Alberta Ambulance Operators Association might well fill this role due to their expertise, their interest,

and their proven cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Speaker, the funding is not sufficiently outlined in this Bill as presented to us. In our view the provincial government, via the governing body, would make available grant moneys to ambulance services which comply with the standards and which are licensed. This could be done properly through municipalities receiving funds earmarked for ambulance services only.

A cost/benefit analysis of establishing a provincewide government-owned ambulance system as in Ontario and B.C. could be undertaken. I'm not sure that the Member for Drumheller, in his review, will be providing us with that kind of in-depth information.

Another element that is absolutely essential is a comprehensive communications network, again not addressed in the Bill. The government appears to be the single responsible form of central dispatching. This, of course, would have to be regionally based and would call upon only licensed, standardized carriers. A regional dispatch centre would publicize an emergency number, 911, whatever. To enhance communications as well, absolutely essential between different types of emergency response units -- fire, police, and so on -- the province could set up an emergency services network linked into the multidepartment mobile radio system. We see a comprehensive communications network as being essential, as a provincial responsibility, and to the success of the whole operation. Again, a system of ensuring that highly trained personnel are kept up to date; the technology is changing very, very rapidly, Mr. Speaker, as we all know. It's essential that they are kept up to date; that we understand and differentiate between air, fixed-wing and helicopter, ambulances and ground ambulances; that ground ambulances, publicly insured, be used in certain kinds of situations. Hopefully the Schumacher study will, in fact, include a cost/benefit analysis of the per-kilometre costs of air versus ground ambulances balanced against the possible health benefits, community benefits, and so on. If it does not include it, then such a study should certainly be undertaken so that regional dispatchers will be well-directed and carefully defined as to what type of ambulance is chosen. I was interested in a recent visit down to Chinook, for a most interesting purpose, as we all know, to hear the extreme concern expressed by residents from a number of communities down there about the change in support for the air ambulance service that they have come to depend upon. Hopefully that will be restored immediately.

Mr. Speaker, we also believe that any such Bill should contain a comprehensive listing of standards for vehicles. We would support the AMA's submission in regard to vehicles, for equipment and for personnel. It is our view that personnel should be at least at the level of basic life support. This position of course has been put forward by the Alberta ambulance operators in their brief.

Mr. Speaker, I can't stress strongly enough how significant I feel an ambulance service is to total health care. I believe that we will achieve out of it savings in lives and savings in dollars. I believe that an ambulance service can combine the best of existing services, public and private, that are presently serving the province. We know that there are many and varied ambulance services, part-time, full-time, across the province. There are differing standards, differing qualities. There are grave inequities across the entire province of Alberta. But we need an ambulance policy that is comprehensive, that is holistic in its approach, that is accountable, and that is responsive.

In my view, having read the Bill carefully, while I appreciate

and support the concept and the principle, I don't believe that Bill 206 provides this. I would expect finally that the province should take responsibility in this regard and show some leadership.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to respond to Bill 206. I realize that there have been some disclaimers mentioned about this being the Bill, but not the Bill. I would like to comment, though, on some features of it because it is what we have before us.

I've looked over the Bill fairly carefully, and I would agree with the general intent of the Bill, and that is that we do need an Act which will deal with needed legislation in the whole field of ambulance operations. Certainly some of the phrases that have been used to support this particular Bill cannot be argued with -- co-ordination and standardization and various other phrases -- unless you start to look at them in some depth.

But getting back to the Bill, Mr. Speaker, I have to raise certain concerns about it. First of all, it indicates that the minister will do a number of things, and then everything else will be by regulation. I can't help but remark that on various occasions in this House that particular approach to enacting legislation has been criticized by other political parties. So such a skeletal Act, with so much left to regulation, I think has to be questioned.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, there is some difficulty, even with this brief outline, in understanding what, even in a general way, would be the nature of the system that would come out of this particular piece of legislation, because it seems to indicate that providing every ambulance operator in the province qualified under the standards that would be prescribed, they would be licensed. It would also be possible for people to be added on the list. That doesn't seem to me to be a very co-ordinated and very effective way in which to design an ambulance system for the province.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that I'm somewhat confused about here is that it would appear that in the Bill this licensing and these arrangements could be made with either private operators or, I suppose, operators of municipal governments and so on. Yet the health care critic for the party, an hon. member of which presented this Bill, seems to be arguing for a provincially owned and run ambulance system. So I have some confusion in my mind as to what would actually result from the implementation of this Bill.

Another point of concern that I have with respect to the Bill, Mr. Speaker, is over on page 2, clause 3. It says:

The Minister may, by order, require that every person who operates a prescribed type of ambulance service be licensed under this Act. . .

et cetera. It seems like the minister is going to be quite busy here. Although I know it was said that, you know, it will all be in regulations, normally in legislation of this type we would have some idea of the general governing structure for an ambulance authority, and there are various models that can be looked at.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

The other two or three items that I think I have to question the Bill -- I note that over on page 3, clause 7(a), it advocates that we should get into the business of "providing for standards of construction" of ambulances. That certainly seems to me to be going beyond what is practically necessary for maintaining ambulance standards. Perhaps the equipment within them,

things of that nature, need to be standardized, but certainly we do not need to go that far. It seems to be a type of Bill which has under the surface a very all-encompassing and very controlling kind of message that comes through.

The Act is also very vague on just what the funding would be. Clause 8 says that it should appropriate money for the purposes of this Act. If that means that it should pay for the whole amount, that it should be charged to Alberta health care, if that's the intent, then we should know that so we could better debate the Bill.

The Act, of course, has no references to some of the other things that I think have to be looked at when we look at future ambulance legislation. That would be the whole matter of air ambulance, because this is designed and focuses upon ground ambulances, as I see it; the question of whether or not there's going to be any local opportunity for the involvement of volunteers, the people that are providing an excellent service and are recognized as important to even the most modern and sophisticated ambulance service that exists in North America.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's rather unfortunate perhaps that the Bill kept being brought forward and forward and forward by the New Democratic Party without ever being improved. It makes an interesting basis for debate certainly, but it's hard to get very much from it.

Since the debate, because of the sparsity of concise information in the Bill, has ranged over to the whole area of the current ambulance situation in the province. I would just like to make some comments in response to the comments that have been made in this general vein. Mr. Speaker, we have had many references to the province setting up, running, operating, and being able to solve all the problems of the ambulance system. I think that we've had reference this afternoon to four different provinces -- British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario -- and our own. All of them, in their particular operations, recognize to a greater or lesser degree that there has to be some allowance for local involvement. You cannot design an ambulance system which is going to cover every community with paramedics and technicians and so on; there has to be some recognition of local involvement, community involvement.

I also have to take issue with the references to the disastrous -- perhaps I'm not using the right term, but the very less-than-adequate -- job that has been referred to on the part of our local ambulance services across this province. Some examples have already been given, but there are many, many very excellent local ambulance operations, be they privately run under contract or run directly by a municipal authority, providing excellent response times, good care and, as the hon. Member for Drumheller mentioned, this by far covers the majority of the province. They take a certain amount of pride in what they are doing, and it shows in the quality of performance and service for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this Bill has raised a very, very important topic. The matter is being reviewed -- that's been referred to many times -- and I along with all members of the Assembly look forward to the completion of the report. I would like to go on to talk about some of the items that are referred to in the Bill, such as ambulance attendants' training, levels of service, in-service education, licensing, and all the rest of it, but in view of the hour I would move to adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: On the motion by the Member for Ponoka-Rimbey to adjourn debate, those in favour please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[The House recessed at 5:28 p.m.]