

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA**

Title: **Thursday, June 16, 1988 2:30 p.m.**

Date: 88/06/16

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

**PRAYERS**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others.

We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of this province of Alberta.

Amen.

**head: INTRODUCTION OF BILLS****Bill 44****Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 1988**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 44, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 1988.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, provides for bringing the Alberta personal income tax legislation in line with the federal income tax legislation in a variety of sections, as we have done historically. But it also makes an important provision in the fiscal plan of this province, and that is that it reduces the temporary flat tax introduced in 1987 by 50 percent to 5 percent, as we indicated in the budget, assuring that all citizens of Alberta have an opportunity to benefit from the new economic growth that's taking place in this province.

[Leave granted; Bill 44 read a first time]

**Bill 45****Alberta Corporate Income Tax Amendment Act, 1988**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to introduce the parallel amendments, Bill 45, the Alberta Corporate Income Tax Amendment Act, 1988.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, essentially deals with those kinds of corrective changes necessary in our Alberta corporate tax to ensure that when we collect tax in this province, it is similarly done on a basis consistent with the federal government jurisdiction. Although this is our own Act and it does reflect our own priorities, it is important for us to ensure that such things as penalties and interest charges are applied consistently.

I should note as well, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill also reflects an important change in one of those interesting taxes introduced by the central government called the petroleum and gas revenue tax, or the PGRT tax. This amendment also reduces or eliminates that intrusive tax once and for all. I move first reading of this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

[Leave granted; Bill 45 read a first time]

**head: INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

DR. WEBBER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly today, a special guest in your gallery, Mrs. Edna Paolucci, who's the mother of one of our hardworking and capable pages in the House, Cecilia Paolucci. Cecilia will be graduating from high school tomorrow from, I believe, St. Francis high school in Calgary, and her mother is up here as our guest today. I ask members to rise and for her to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce 51 students from the Laurier Heights school who are accompanied by students from Nanaimo, B.C., at the école Pauline Haarer school. They are seated in the members' gallery and are accompanied by teachers Miss Karina Younk and Joanne Schryer, by parents Val Duthie, Winnie Ruchay, and Sally Shinn, and bus driver Roy Bannerman. The students are in a French immersion program at the Laurier Heights school, and I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

MR. CLEGG: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you, 21 students from the Blueberry Creek school in the wonderful constituency of Dunvegan. They are accompanied today by their teacher Mr. Jim Gurnett and parents Donna Skoworodko -- I hope I pronounced that right -- and Ken Charlton. I would ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the other members of the Assembly today, some 40 grade 6 students from Menisa elementary school in the riding of Edmonton-Mill Woods. They are accompanied today by their teachers Diane Fernet, John McQuay, and Jean Edwards. I'd ask them to stand now and receive the very warm welcome of the House.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and members of the Assembly today, six members of a touring group from the Rotary Club from Australia. This is a study group of six individuals who are young, bright, and energetic. Representing their clubs and businesses, they are members of Rotary District 945 in Western Australia and are on a six-week study tour of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Watson from Red Deer, who are the parents of Mike Watson, the Legislative intern who works in our office. This is their first visit to the Legislative Assembly, and we welcome them.

**head: ORAL QUESTION PERIOD****Debate of Bills 21 and 22**

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, after yesterday's exchange in the question period between the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier I looked back to see the number of days that the Labour minister's world tour took. I counted 34 days for those 14 people to be on the tour. Then I looked at the number of hours that we've been debating Bills 21 and 22. The hours came to 10 and 11 hours respectively. I wonder if knowing those facts, Mr.

Speaker, the Premier can now justify in that context shutting down second reading on those two important Bills.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right; we did deal with this matter yesterday, and I am prepared to deal with it again in question period. That is that a government never particularly wants to use the closure rule in a Parliament. But it is a part of Parliament. We only had to watch and observe the hon. members. They were not in any way trying to deal with the Bill in a positive, reasonable manner. As a matter of fact, one of the funny things was that they said, "Boy, we've got amendments we want to make in committee," yet they wouldn't allow it to go to committee. Now, that made no sense whatsoever. So closure is only used, and Parliament and Legislatures provide for it to be used, when it is necessary to have the House function on a responsible, positive basis. That's when it's used here.

MS BARRETT: Slim argument, Mr. Speaker. Nine hours, and it's too much for the Premier.

Well, he wasn't clear in the Assembly yesterday on another issue. Has the Premier already predetermined a set amount of time in which we will be given a chance to provide our 80 or so amendments in the committee readings of these Bills? Has he decided what limit he's going to impose at that stage?

MR. GETTY: No, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: Well, that's good, Mr. Speaker. Then I'll ask the Premier if he's prepared now to assure the Assembly, knowing that the Official Opposition, the caucus that does seem to care about these Bills, has got about 80 amendments for committee stage, will he assure the Assembly that he will provide enough time for the introduction and debate of those very constructive amendments?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the track record is anything to judge that by, you wouldn't want to do that because most of the amendments were without any particular benefits to the Legislature or to the legislation. So I think that the House will decide by observing the way the Bills proceed. Then we'll see what is the action of the Legislature.

Might I say, Mr. Speaker, having been able to discuss this matter with people both in labour and management, I have been very pleased by the number of people in organized labour who are supporting this legislation.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary question, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I wonder, then, if the Premier is not concerned just a little bit that there is the equivalent of -- what? -- 816 hours per individual on that minister's world tour, and he's not prepared to give us a minimum number of hours for committee stage . . . If he's not worried that this government looks like it's on the run and is afraid of parliamentary process.

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't heard anything so foolish in a long time in the Legislature. I normally give the hon. member credit for a little more brains than that. We've been in the Legislature since early March. We sit days and nights. The members have lots of opportunity. The members bring certain things on themselves; they have only themselves to

blame.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, it's a supplementary to the House leader. Could he give the House any idea of what his time schedule is for third reading for the two labour Bills? Or is it very simple: we just phone Kananaskis and find out what the golf reservation times are?

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has dealt quite fully with this. The fact is that the Legislature governs itself. There are certain rules of procedure. The opposition has invoked at second reading the process of reasoned amendments, which in my 17 years in this Assembly I don't think I've ever been treated to before nor seen them before. That's a very . . . [interjections] It's provided under the rules, but also it doesn't lead to any constructive debate of the Bill. It's simply a delaying tactic, and we all realize that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. leader's desire to go golfing at Kananaskis, those are private arrangements, and he'll have to deal directly with Kananaskis himself. I can't do that for him.

MR. WEISS: I perhaps could add some supplementary information to that, Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for Kananaskis. There are no advance reservations made, so . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister. [interjections] Order please. I'm sure all hon. members in the House would like to go golfing sometime before the middle of September.

Second main question, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Perhaps the minister just wants into question period more often, Mr. Speaker. I'll dream up one for you.

I'll designate the second question, please, to the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

#### Assistance for Child Care

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, in light of the Premier's stated support of the family, I'm sure that he is aware that 62 percent more double-income families would fall below the poverty line if one spouse was without a job. For this reason as well as many other reasons -- some being that parents are students, parents don't have extended families to rely on, and others are job hunting -- Alberta parents find day care a necessity to provide care for their children. To the Minister of Social Services. Will the minister outline her new day care policy and confirm that she intends to drop the operating allowance?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, I've responded to day care questions quite often. The hon. member knows full well that the information has not yet been received from the federal government in respect to what type of funds will flow as a result of their new policy. I would say categorically that there's been no announcement about operating allowance.

MS MJOLSNESS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the minister has, in fact, indicated that she will be dropping the operating allowance. I would like the minister, then, to explain that if this does happen, does she intend for her government to pocket that money, or will she in fact return that money to subsidies so that parents in this province will be able to afford day care?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would say once more that I'm not sure where the hon. member gets her information, if it's from newspaper articles or gossip. But I have indicated time and time again that we must look at the dollars that are going to high-income families. I don't know how the hon. member could justify families that are making \$60,000, \$80,000 a year getting as much as \$400 a month, when she knows very well there are low-income families that need more help.

MS MJOLSNESS: That's a very small percentage of families utilizing day care.

Mr. Speaker, many families are worried that they will not qualify for a subsidy for day care and that they will not be able to pay these increased fees of up to \$275 a child. Now, would the minister then explain at what level of income a family should not qualify for a subsidy?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to receive the hon. member's information or their caucus' views on that subject.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're the minister.

MS MJOLSNESS: To the Premier, then, a final supplementary. The Premier has stated that there is a need to support families in this province. Given that parents are very concerned over the proposed changes, will the Premier ensure that all families who are in need of child care will be able to afford it?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no problem with saying that all families who absolutely need day care assistance will receive that assistance. That's been the record of the government since I've been here. I have no trouble with that whatsoever.

I should point out to the hon. member that not just in the area of day care do we provide assistance for families, but an even broader way, Mr. Speaker. Since the hon. member has raised the income level of families, I should point out that in the tax cuts that were provided this year -- the selective tax cuts so that they impact more on low-income families than anyone else -- we have dramatic reductions. For instance, we have, in the areas of total income for an individual of \$10,000, an 84 percent cut in personal taxes; for an income of \$12,500, a 20 percent cut in tax; for \$15,000, a 13 percent cut in tax. Now, for a family of four, they pay no taxes to \$15,000; then for \$20,000 total income, a 21.5 percent cut in taxes; for \$30,000, a 10 percent cut in taxes. This is with no sales tax. This government's doing more for families to have money in their hands so that they can participate in this fine province we live in. That's our commitment.

MR. SPEAKER: Cypress-Redcliff, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. TAYLOR: And Pocklington and Husky.

MR. SPEAKER: And if Westlock-Sturgeon wants in, he can signify it as well.

MR. HYLAND: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Social Services. I wonder if the minister can assure the Assembly that when she's re-examining the day care policies in this province, she will take into account Motion 206 on

the Order Paper, that receives strong support in this Assembly relating to how the other 80 percent of the families in Alberta could access assistance.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, once again a very important point, because so often when the Official Opposition talks about child care in this province, it seems to be their view that there's only one kind of acceptable child care, and that's in an institutional setting. Certainly some parents will choose that, but the high percentage of parents choose other kinds of care. It is our view that we should provide every opportunity for parents making another choice in that we should create a more even-handed situation.

Mr. Speaker, in response to a comment across the floor for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who said, you know, "You're the minister," I'm delighted to make that decision. But with all the interjections that have been going on over the last while and in debate on other Bills, their problem seems to be that they don't believe they have enough input. I am inviting it.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, to the minister. With all of these comments about changes in allocations of funds to day care, people are pretty anxious to know what is really going to happen. Is the minister prepared to exert the same amount of control over fee schedules for day care centres as has been placed in the Child Welfare Act amendments regarding private adoptions?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, there is a great range of child care available in this province; in fact there are vacancies. I believe that people have the opportunity to shop around and make the very best judgment -- and that includes economic judgment -- that's available to them. I don't believe that the government should intervene in that regard.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon, main question.

#### **Funding for Ambulance Service**

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My main question is to the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care. It follows along on the ambulance crisis that's been developing, in particular with municipalities, a crisis that's been largely manufactured by the minister's own truculence and, in some ways, lack of competence in handling the department . . .

MR. SPEAKER: That's an inappropriate comment.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I said "lack of competence," not "incompetence." Okay, while you're looking that up, I will go on.

There's no question that the minister's been irresponsibly attempting to place the responsibility for that provincial political decision onto the shoulders of either the municipal governments or the ambulance operators. Now, is it not the case -- to the minister -- that this minister has to date made no effort whatsoever to initiate any meetings with the Alberta Ambulance Operators Association except yesterday's announcement that his staff would meet with them, in spite of letters starting since September 29, 1987?

MR. SPEAKER: Before the minister rises, hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, the Chair really is reluctant to get involved,

but again you also said "irresponsible." That's an unparliamentary term as well. You should withdraw that; then the minister can reply.

MR. TAYLOR: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. If using it is irresponsible, then I will change it to "lack of responsibility."

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. That makes it parliamentary somehow, wonderfully. Thank you for the withdrawal.

Hon. minister on the reply. Thank you.  
Supplementary.

MR. TAYLOR: Peculiar now; at least he admits he has made no effort whatsoever to initiate any meetings with the Alberta Ambulance Operators Association. This is indeed amazing.

Is it not true that any increase that there's been in the ambulance rates were telegraphed to the Premier last September '87 and consisted only in reducing the Blue Cross coverage? He knew at that time it was only for one year that the rate would be coming up in July of '88. Now he acts surprised.

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Liberal Party doesn't even remember what kind of a question he asked. First of all, he asked if I would admit that I had made no efforts to meet with the Ambulance Operators Association, and my answer was no, I will not admit that because I have made efforts to meet with them and to understand what their point of view is.

With respect to ambulance rates, I repeat what I said yesterday. Provision of ambulance services is a municipal responsibility. It so happens that the province came in several years ago and took responsibility for the transfer of patients from outlying hospitals into the major urban centres: interhospital transfer. It also so happens that we took responsibility for the cost of air ambulance. We have also taken responsibility for the payment of a substantial portion -- in fact, in most cases almost the total amount of the cost of ambulance services through Alberta Blue Cross for our seniors. We also, through the Department of Social Services, of course, provide a lot of ambulance services for people who are on social assistance. There is, I repeat again, Mr. Speaker, a great deal of funding provided by this government for ambulance services throughout the province, but we're not at the present time in a position to take over the municipal responsibilities.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, the question is that a year ago he knew this was coming; a year ago he said they would do something about it. Why did the minister, then, write to the municipalities recently -- very obviously a scare tactic -- and try to tell them not to increase their fees or not to go through with helping out the companies, and if they did, it would be entirely at their own behest, when he knew a year ago that they were ready and expected some sort of a contribution from the government at this time?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, a year ago we had no increase in operating grants, insofar as our programs are concerned, or increases in ambulance services. I did not expect that the Ambulance Operators Association were going to ask for 30 percent in 1988. Indeed, what they have suggested in my view is a much larger increase than what should be called for. All that I did with respect to municipalities is make them aware of our concerns about the magnitude of the increase that was being proposed by the Alberta Ambulance Operators Association.

Indeed, some ambulance authorities such as Edmonton Ambulance [Authority] did not even ask for the amount that was suggested by the association. They've asked for less than that. My understanding is that some ambulance authorities have even asked for less than that of their municipal councils. So I wrote the letter to all councils to make them aware of our concern for the rapidly increasing amounts that were being requested by the association. That's a responsible thing to do.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, the responsible thing to do would have been to settle the agreement of September 29, 1987, when they said that in one year you would reach an agreement.

Well, then, would the minister go on and tell the House why, in view that he was informed September 29, 1987, we're still waiting for some decision from the provincial government as to the type of funding they will give municipalities towards ambulance care? Why are we still waiting?

MR. M. MOORE: The hon. member is not listening. This government does not provide funding to municipalities for ambulance services. That is a municipal responsibility and always has been. What we do is provide funding for air ambulance services, for interhospital transfer -- now, listen carefully -- and we also provide funding for those persons covered by Blue Cross who are over 65 years of age. We also provide funding for people who are on social assistance for ambulance services. Now, if the member can't remember those four categories, perhaps he could refer to *Hansard*. Finally, it's a municipal responsibility to provide ambulance services for all other people. Again, the hon. member could refer to *Hansard* of yesterday, or today if he has trouble remembering that tomorrow morning.

REV. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I'm more concerned about the 20 or 30 percent of average Albertans who are not covered in any way with any insurance for ambulance care. What support is the minister actively giving to enable Albertans throughout the province to have some form of insurance so that they can have prehospital emergency care to get them to the hospitals and the health care system which is second to none in the world, and have that kind of insured service for them in the prehospital emergency care side of things?

MR. M. MOORE: What we have done, Mr. Speaker -- and I'll be repeating comments I've made on two occasions within the last month -- is put together a policy advisory committee chaired by the hon. Member for Drumheller, who went across this province over the course of the last year and listened to every single group and individual person who wished to talk to them and then wrote a report that's called *New Dimensions in Emergency Health Services*, that the hon. member would be well advised to read. It's the report that doesn't say that the solution is to close rural hospitals. It's the report that suggests there should be some major changes with respect to the ambulance system in our province, and we have asked for a response to this report from all of the interest groups by the end of September of this year. We will then be in a position to review that response and determine what kind of new policies, what kind of new legislation, what kind of new funding, if there is to be some, should go into the ambulance system. That's the process that we set out to follow a year ago. We're on schedule, and I would commend the hon. member to read the report, study it and he would understand.

### Fiscal Policies

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Provincial Treasurer. The minister's budget estimate for the 1988-89 year is based on an oil price of \$18.50 U.S. Since that time and in the first quarter of this current fiscal year prices have averaged around \$16.50, or about \$2 less than that. Could the minister indicate or advise the House: with this projected shortfall of revenues, what type of adjustments may be made in the current budget or what type of plans may be in the works at this time?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, although we're only two and a half months into the current fiscal year, I do agree with the member that the price changes in the oil markets have caused some concern about the long-term predictability of the average price of oil. But I should say that it seems to me that we're fairly early on in the fiscal year, and I think a lot will happen as we move through the colder months to the end of March 31, 1989. I would expect that although there will be fluctuations in the price, as I noted in the budget speech, the oil price itself will be fairly comfortable around that \$17 to \$17.50 in the near term and will rise through on average close to the prediction we're using. Obviously, as we've said before, Mr. Speaker, the sharp fluctuations in oil and gas prices do expose us. And the reason we put in the budget the \$18.50 focus point was to ensure that Albertans understand along with us the difficulties we face in predicting the price of oil and the impact that the oil price change has on our revenues, about 28 percent of our revenues in fact. So Albertans understand the fiscal plan and understand the difficulties we face in terms of meeting some of our obligations based on the frailty of world oil prices.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, to the Provincial Treasurer. Has the Provincial Treasurer any indicators or events that are scheduled in the near future in terms of the OPEC nations or information of such that may be guideposts that will indicate trends in the future oil price?

MR. JOHNSTON: Again, the member from his number of years of experience knows that there is an OPEC cartel, and over the past week we saw the Vienna meetings causing some uncertainties in the oil market. Late last week the price was off on the WTI and the New York mercantile market by 25 or 30 cents, recovered early this week back to a reasonable level again, but obviously the OPEC cartel is struggling itself with production quotas. It's my best guess that we would see the cartel start to retain its position, that the cheating is starting to eliminate, and we'll see the price firm around that \$18 to \$18.50 level through the balance of 1988-89.

Now, my colleague the Minister of Energy, as you well know, had a representative at the, I guess, April meeting of OPEC when in fact this whole question of production quotas was discussed. He may well want to shed some light or his views on this. But it seems to me that given the current strength of OPEC and given the uncertainty in the Middle East, which in a normal situation would drive the price up -- if Iran and Iraq were bombing their drilling towers -- that kind of a regime probably bodes for a constant price, nominally adjusted for inflation, around \$18.50.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the fundamental demand figures coming in for 1987 are now showing that the world demand is increasing much more rapidly than we had expected. Certainly in the United States that demand function

itself is increasing beyond our expectations, which means that on the natural gas side in particular our gas exports appear to be strong going into that market and we look at an expansion of about 1.1 trillion cubic feet in the '88-89 year, at a better price.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary to the Treasurer. In terms of increased exports to the United States, one of the effects on the gross revenue that we secure would be affected by the dollar value and could be affected significantly. Could the minister indicate what projections, even in terms of the current dollar value, which has increased our dollar relative to the American dollar, and the adverse effect it may have on our budgetary revenue?

MR. JOHNSTON: Again, Mr. Speaker, that's quite right, and we like to ensure that Albertans have this information, that obviously because so much of our commodity is sold in United States dollars -- and I know all Albertans are aware that the current value of the Canadian dollar is trading around the 82 cent level on a cross-currency basis with U.S. dollars -- if our Canadian dollar goes up, we lose in dollars in terms of our oil and gas revenues.

The factor we use is approximately a \$25 million to \$30 million per cent change on an average basis over the year. You don't have to be a financial wizard to understand that on that basis, for the first month and a half at least we are somewhat below our expectations because of the currency position -- although I don't expect that the 82 cent price will maintain over the period ahead; our budget itself uses about 78 cents on an average exchange rate through '88-89.

MR. R. SPEAKER: To the minister, Mr. Speaker. In terms of looking at revenue shortfall, would the minister consider in the fiscal year '88-89 any further issue of Alberta bonds to take up that shortfall?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suppose we could do that. I can do two things. First of all, I can advise the House that our best estimate now of Alberta capital bond sales for this current campaign will be of the order of \$280 million to \$285 million. Therefore, I think all Albertans have responded to the assistance of our province: building universities, drawing together in the time when we have to borrow money. Of course, appropriately so, the interest flows back to Albertans, which I think is the right thing to do.

However, because of the province's very good credit rating, Mr. Speaker, we are able to borrow funds worldwide. I don't like to borrow money, but of course because our deficit this year calls for about a \$900 million deficit we will have to fund that somewhere. We'll use a combination of short-term borrowings through a variety of purposes and long-term borrowings wherever appropriate, and I think that the province because of its very good creditworthiness in world markets can achieve it at a very low rate.

As to Alberta capital bonds, I think we will end them now and look forward to doing them again next summer.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.  
Edmonton-Kingsway, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, then, is to the Premier. I would like to know how his efforts to get the federal government to slow down the upward interest

rate climb that we've had recently are going, so that that will slow down the upward pressure on the dollar.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member's been observing, he might know now that we have also the Premier of Ontario and the Premier of Quebec supporting the Alberta position that we should have a lower interest rate. Also, we have the governor of the Bank of Canada, Mr. Crow, responding publicly about our desire and request to have a lower interest rate. I noted that last week when there was an anticipated and projected increase, there wasn't one; it was, in fact, flat. So let's hope that today and in coming weeks the requests of Premiers of almost the entire nation asking that interest rates be lower -- that we will have that kind of recognition from the Bank of Canada.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy. The price of natural gas has been a free-fall, and we're selling great amounts of a precious, wasting asset to the United States now at relatively cheap prices. I'm wondering whether the minister can tell us what we are experiencing now and what he foresees with respect to the pricing trends of export gas to the United States.

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, natural gas prices have certainly had a downward pressure in the last couple of years and, we believe, have bottomed out. The hon. member should also remember that last January we put in place a system of calculating royalties so that the Crown would be protected against lower prices should producers decide to sell their natural gas at the lower prices, with the 80 percent provision for calculation of royalties. So that would certainly help in terms of our revenue picture.

With respect to the coming year, it's expected that with the colder weather in the winter and increased demand in the United States we would see an upward pressure on the prices. In fact, we saw an increase in exports last year of some 31 percent in natural gas, and the National Energy Board is forecasting another 20 percent increase in volumes of natural gas into the United States. So with these increased volumes the revenues overall are holding up fairly well, and if prices increase as anticipated during the course of the next winter, then that will be of additional assistance to our producers.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West, followed by Athabasca-Lac La Biche, then Edmonton-Meadowlark.

### **Family and Community Support**

DR. CASSIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To our Minister of Social Services. Madam Minister, communications are all-important, particularly in the area of Social Services. In Calgary the question of day care and changes are concerns, certainly, to my constituents. I would ask the minister if she perhaps could comment on the mechanisms should there be changes and, more important, what type of communication she's had with the day care network, which I understand represents most of the day care operators.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right in his mentioning of the day care network. This is an informal group of people who are recognized as speaking for almost

every single organization in the province that has some relationship with formal day care as well as family group homes. One organization, and the hon. member may be alluding to this, the Day Care Society, participated in our very last meeting, and unfortunately, because they did not have the background of many other discussions -- and they're very wide-ranging discussions -- apparently have jumped to some conclusions as a result of that meeting. We certainly hope we can avoid that in the future.

DR. CASSIN: Thank you. A supplementary to the minister. I understand that the minister is communicating with her federal counterpart from the standpoint of the proposed federal program. What difficulties does that present, seeing as how that is targeted to space allocations as opposed to programs, and how would that affect Alberta?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's part of the ongoing discussions. It has been our view that Alberta just wants to be treated fairly, either under the CAP program, and that is that the federal government should cost share private-sector day care, which is chosen by a high percentage of parents in this province, as well as the nonprofit organizations or municipal entities that provide day care. The federal government has not been doing that. It is our view in the first instance that through the CAP program they could make that fairness occur on behalf of the province of Alberta. But they have chosen to go a different route that as well, I should say, I'm happy recognizes the stay-at-home parent, only to a small degree but at least works in that direction. It would be my view that if we were to look at the amount of dollars that the federal government chooses to contribute to child care in this country and if on a per capita or other mechanism basis Alberta could get their fair share, then certainly we would be able to do a better job in terms of what the parents in Alberta want to do on behalf of their children.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

DR. CASSIN: Final supplementary to the Minister of Social Services. Would the minister comment on the federal government's announcement of its program on family violence and prevention and how that will affect us in Alberta?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, the federal government's announcement on family violence is not tied to the same mechanism as either the CAP program or the proposed day care program. It is another program altogether. I'd say that we have a concern here. While it is very important that the federal government address this issue, if they've been getting pressure from across the country, it would be my hope that, again, they would allow flexibility. Because if they choose to get into capital facilities, they may be increasing operational costs for provinces who cannot afford it. Of course, in terms of the Alberta situation we have already indirectly paid for a large number of capital facilities in this province and, therefore, would not benefit.

Mr. Speaker, just recently I've had the support of my colleagues in putting in an additional \$176,000, added to the budget for this fiscal year as a result of very good communications with the Council of Women's Shelters, who have just done an extraordinary job in working with their particular budget and sharing the money which they believe to be appropriate with each shelter across the province. This is an organization that works very well together, and I hope all Albertans in addition will support their programs, because they go far beyond the

shelter programs.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, I thought we were talking about day care.

Will the minister now undertake to the citizens of Alberta that any new day care legislation or regulations will include a commitment for parents who require respite care, temporary child care, special needs children, and those who want to use day homes?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, I believe we have a very good program in place for family day homes. That doesn't mean it can't be enhanced, and that's part of the whole more formalized day care discussion. When you get into the area where families may need respite care, normally that falls under handicapped children's services, and I would hope that we are meeting the parents' need in that regard there. With respect to the day cares that take on special needs children, there is a program for that, and it has been my advice that that is working well. If the hon. member has some specifics that she would like to raise, I would be pleased to receive them.

MS MJOLSNESS: To the minister, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister explain why she will not indicate what her new proposal is so that parents and care givers can quit worrying about what it is they're to expect?

MRS. OSTERMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be really wonderful if government could save people everywhere in this province from worry, but unfortunately I don't have that kind of ability. I believe that most of the worry that is in the minds of the public out there right now, and those would be lower income people, has been engendered by the attitude of some members, and maybe one particular organization that is going about the province saying, "The sky is falling; the sky is falling." I can assure the hon. member that there will be no precipitous action taken, and if there is a diminishment of the dollars that go to high-income families right now, they would have plenty of opportunity to adjust to that.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.  
Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

### Natural Gas Pricing

MR. PIQUETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 31 the Alberta government allowed the natural gas protection plan to expire, which since 1974 has guaranteed Alberta residential and industrial consumers the lowest natural gas prices in Canada. Now the Public Utilities Board has adopted a new formula to let utilities companies pass on seasonal price increases to consumers. As a result, gas utilities are already planning major price hikes for next winter, and already Alberta families are going to be ripped off this winter. To the Premier: why did the government abandon the gas price protection plan this year, which will force families in Alberta to pay more for Alberta-produced gas than American businesses buying it at the border for bargain prices?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I wonder at the hon. member's use of the term "ripped off." Surely when the Public Utilities Board approves certain levels of pricing, it's done as a result of a hearing and showing the various costs and the transmission charges,

and then the charge flows through to all of us as consumers. Now, if the hon. member is making the statement that the Public Utilities Board is not doing their job, I wish he would substantiate it and we would then look at the charges that he's prepared to make.

Now, as far as the natural gas protection plan, it was set at a certain level, and the price fell below that level. Therefore, the protection plan was not needed, and in fact Albertans can feel good about the fact that while these prices were extremely high, they were protected. Now the prices are lower; the protection is no longer needed. I just suggest to the hon. member that this is taxpayers' money; this is taxpayers' money that he is asking to be used. If the price drops below the protection level, surely you don't keep pouring taxpayers' money in there.

MR. PIQUETTE: But the point is, Mr. Premier, that Americans are buying it cheaper than we are here in Alberta, and I think Albertans find that to be unacceptable. Will the Premier explain why he supports policies whereby big American gas distributors can buy Alberta gas at a lower price than Alberta families are forced to pay for it to heat their homes and cook their food?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, there may be certain long-term gas contracts of some type the hon. member's referring to. But on a general basis the people of Alberta pay the lowest prices for natural gas in North America.

MR. PIQUETTE: Well, Mr. Premier, experts in the industry indicate that Alberta families will face an increase of between \$20 to \$30 per month in their natural gas bills this winter. Now, to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities: how much of an increase in natural gas prices is the minister willing to let Alberta families pay before bringing back the natural gas protection plan? Just what is the trigger price?

MR. ADAIR: Well, Mr. Speaker, initially that's a hypothetical question, in the sense that what the Premier said just a moment ago was the fact that the prices were below the level set, that \$1.82 per mcf, I believe it was at that time; I don't think it was a gigajoule then. But with that price well below that right now, there is no need for the introduction of the price protection plan. If it does come in the future, at this point it's hypothetical.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.  
Final supplementary question.

MR. PIQUETTE: The minister can do a lot better . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary question.

MR. PIQUETTE: Now, agricultural producers use large amounts of natural gas for drying grain, for heating glass houses, and in pork and poultry production. But under the free trade deal U. S. producers will very likely challenge the continuation of price breaks for these Alberta producers. Will the minister please explain how he can support this aspect of the free trade deal that so clearly threatens this important support program for farm families?

MR. ADAIR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only thing I might say is that I would ask my colleague the Minister of Energy to maybe respond in the sense of what some of those contracts may be. I'm not aware of what those contracts are right at the moment.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary information, Minister of Energy. Quickly.

DR. WEBBER: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure of the full impact of his question, but what I have been hearing from the hon. member is complete misinformation about what's happening out there in the marketplace. The other day in the House when we were dealing with a particular piece of legislation, I informed the hon. member that prices into the United States were higher than prices into the Canadian market. Today he turns around and either distorts it intentionally or doesn't listen, in terms of what the pricing situation is. Consumers in this province are benefiting from the lower prices of natural gas. The hon. minister has already responded -- and the Premier as well has responded -- that price protection has been in place here for years, and Alberta consumers have received great benefit over many, many years at a time when prices were higher. Right now the prices are lower, and they're receiving the benefits from that as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Main question, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Point of order after question period.

#### Medical Specialists' Fee Schedule

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care. The minister's decision to deal directly with cardiovascular surgeons on fee negotiations raises questions about what will become of the Alberta Medical Association. How is the minister going to handle the approaches of other groups within the medical profession now that they can see how effective a single group can be by bypassing the Alberta Medical Association and dealing directly with the minister?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, I dealt fairly completely with that matter a couple of days ago in question period, but I'll do so again. When we were negotiating with the Alberta Medical Association last fall for fee schedules for 1988, I indicated to them that it was our desire that they should put a considerable amount of the funding that was being provided by us -- the 1.5 percent additional funds, plus 1.5 percent from every fee schedule -- toward the cardiovascular fee schedule, because I was concerned that Alberta was well below most provinces in that area in Canada. We're having trouble attracting new cardiovascular surgeons and, indeed, keeping the ones that we already have. The AMA in their allocation declined to do that.

At the same time, I also told the AMA that it was my intention to provide additional funding in the amount of \$1 million that would go into this fee schedule. They declined to have anything to do with the allocation of that because it was against their policy to allocate that much into that particular section of medicine. So, having no other option . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you hon. minister. The time for question period has expired. Might we have unanimous consent of the House to complete this series of questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Thank you.  
Hon. minister.

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, having no other option, we proceeded to try and implement the additional amounts in a fair and equitable way. I should advise the hon. member that the exact amount of increases in each section have not yet been finalized. It's close to finalized. The amount of \$1 million being added to the fee schedule is, of course, a decision that we've made that is final. But how that will be allocated in the cardiovascular area is not yet finalized.

I should just add one other thing, Mr. Speaker. There now appears to be some interest by the Alberta Medical Association in actually getting involved in this problem rather than wiping it under the table.

MR. MITCHELL: Is the minister saying, then, that the AMA will represent the interests of doctors effectively only as long as they agree with what the minister himself wants to set out to do? Is he not aware . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. That's a good enough . . .

MR. M. MOORE: The situation is simply this. The AMA isn't able always to agree on increases in fee schedules for certain professional groups. For example, there are, I believe, 44 surgical oncologists over at the Cross Cancer Institute who are getting paid on a sessional basis. Their salaries are well below some in other provinces, and we're losing them to Ontario in particular. So we recently authorized an increase of \$770,000 to the Cross Cancer Institute to raise the payments for those doctors. This is a matter that wasn't even requested by the AMA during the fee negotiations. Now, we can't simply sit on our hands for a year at a time or two years or whatever time it takes for the AMA to make a decision when we have an area of medicine where we believe some additional funds must be put in place.

MR. MITCHELL: Has the minister made any assessment of what effect this move on his part to go directly to a given group within the medical profession will have upon the effectiveness of the AMA, and what is to stop all these other groups that are convinced that they are underfunded to come directly to the minister and thereby do away with the effectiveness of the AMA entirely?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, the effect of the decision will be that Alberta will continue to be a leader in the cardiovascular area in terms of medical care in our province. We will not be losing our specialists to other provinces or to the United States, and we will probably be in a much better position than we previously were to attract topflight surgeons to our province.

MR. MITCHELL: Could the minister please inform the House what his assessment is of what the role of the Alberta Medical Association should be? Is it there simply to agree with him and to support the initiatives he wants to take, or is it there to provide him with advice that he will listen to and act upon?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, I tabled in this Legislature, in early August of 1986, a copy of an agreement between the Alberta Medical Association and our government with respect to



the end of extra billing in the manner in which the AMA would relate to ourselves in terms of billing and negotiating and arbitrating fees. Any actions we have taken during the course of the past several months have been perfectly in accord with that agreement.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

REV. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see the Liberals were asking all my questions, but a new one to the minister is whether or not . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

MR. SPEAKER: The question.

REV. ROBERTS: Could the minister indicate, with respect to the critical shortage in the province of cardiac nurses who are needed in terms of cardiac surgery, if he is going to allocate a special 35 percent increase to their salaries so that we will not continue to have a chronic shortage for cardiac care nurses in the province as well?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, it would be irresponsible for us to not act in areas where we believe there is a real need for changes in benefits or salaries or fee schedules in order to ensure that we continue to have good medical care in our province. One of the components of the agreement that was reached between the Alberta Hospital Association and the United Nurses of Alberta, and indeed between the Staff Nurses Association and the University hospital, was for a very substantial increase at another level, a seventh step; that's for nurses who've served more than six years. There are also going to be some recommendations coming forward very shortly from the Hyndman commission with respect to nurses and how they can be better rewarded, if you like, for expertise and years of service. So, there is a great deal of thought that goes into the area the hon. member mentions. I think, again in the context of Canada, that Alberta in that area certainly ranks in the top three provinces.

MR. SPEAKER: Additional supplementaries? Thank you.

Time for question period has expired. The Chair has been notified of two points of order. First, Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under the provisions of Standing Order 23(h). Mr. Speaker shall call to order a member who:

(h) makes allegations against another member.

I'd like to quote from *Hansard* yesterday where the Minister of Agriculture said:

. . . I indicated to the hon. Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, as I did to the hon. Member for Vegreville and the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, that if they had specific concerns, I'd be more than happy to deal with them. None of them has brought me any specific concerns, so it only leads me to believe that they're raising issues that are nonissues.

Mr. Speaker, this is in reference to questions on the water supply assistance program. Now I have sent to you copies of letters that I sent to a constituent of mine, Mr. Eugene Toma, outlining the merits of the government's water supply assistance program; a letter that I sent to the Minister of Agriculture on May 24 on behalf of Mr. Toma, making a specific request about the dugout

construction program following a question that I'd asked in this Assembly on May 20 on the same issue; a copy of my letter to Mr. Toma, sending a copy of the letter to the minister; and a copy of the letter the minister sent to me in response to that specific concern. The minister may want to imply that he was referring to my not raising any specific concerns with pumping programs, but I would like to point out that I approached the hon. minister informally in this Chamber, raised specific concerns on behalf of Willis and Agatha Toma with regard to the pumping program. The minister quite courteously did some investigation in his department and responded to me informally as well. So I might point out that I didn't raise those issues in the House, but I dealt with them in a responsible way on behalf of my constituents.

So the minister is making allegations that don't stick. I can understand that his background in Ottawa influences his behaviour in this House, Mr. Speaker, but I'm determined that he's not going to score cheap political points . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Perhaps the hon. minister would like to respond.

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to have this opportunity to respond. I sent the hon. Member for Vegreville a note indicating to him that I did interpret it as specifics to the pumping program. I indicated to the hon. member and he raised it in the House, but he never sent me anything as it related to the individual he said was having problems because he needed a smaller pump. I'm more than happy to investigate it. The first thing I heard of the name was when he mentioned it today. [interjection] I would hope the hon. member would give me the courtesy of a reply, because I listened very patiently to him. I would hope he'd exercise the same restraint, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member obviously has a very guilty conscience, because when you look at the *Hansard* from yesterday, it appears as if he was debating with the Member for Edmonton-Calder when he went through a litany of comments. I'm not sure why, because -- and I say this to the hon. members for Vegreville or Athabasca-Lac La Biche, Westlock-Sturgeon, Clover Bar -- in the event that specific concerns are brought to my attention, I'm more than happy to respond.

I'm sorry I couldn't respond more favourably to the hon. member who wanted to have more retroactivity in the dugout program. We responded to that. But he never sent me anything specifically to do with the pumping program, Mr. Speaker, even though he's attempting again, as he does consistently, to twist the truth. He does it so consistently. But I'm more than happy . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order in the whole House. The Chair is not prepared to put up with this kind of backchat when we're trying to deal with a matter of importance to the House. It's obviously of great importance to the Member for Vegreville and the Minister of Agriculture. The dialogue is at least between the two of them, not amongst the whole rest of the group who want to get into the debate. At the end of the comments by the Member for Vegreville, the Chair had to interject again because there was an uproar of sorts in the House, and here we are again. So, hon. members, please keep it quiet so we can hear what's going on.

Any final comments, Minister of Agriculture.

MR. ELZINGA: Let me just reinforce, Mr. Speaker -- and thank you for your comments -- what I indicated yesterday. If

there are specifics, if the hon. member has a specific concern as it relates to small pumps, if he brings it to my attention, I'm more than happy to follow it through. But the hon. member has not given me the specifics. He raised it in the House but he's not given me the specifics on that.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The Chair appreciates the fact that the Member for Vegreville gave prior notice, at least during question period, with regard to this issue, and having supplied the document from *Hansard* as of yesterday. The Member for Vegreville also has indeed supplied copies of correspondence, as pointed out, with Mr. Toma bearing the dates of May 9; a letter to the Minister of Agriculture, dated May 24; a letter to Mr. Toma, May 26; and the letter from the Minister of Agriculture to the Member for Vegreville, dated June 10. Now, the Chair hasn't had sufficient time to deal with whatever the contents are -- whether it covers the exact points which are of concern to the Member for Vegreville and the Minister of Agriculture. But the Chair really has to invoke *Beauchesne* 322, the dispute as to the facts, as to the contents of what went on. Nevertheless, it has appeared it's indeed true from the evidence put forward that correspondence took place between both hon. members. Now, whether it dealt with the exact issues they wanted them to deal with is a matter for their own mutual concern and resolution.

The Chair also wants to point out that it is a bit irregular to be raising this point of order today when, in actual fact, the matter came up in yesterday's question period. But we've listened nevertheless, and it's resolved as being a dispute between members.

The other thing that happened here yesterday, looking at the record, is that while it is not recorded in *Hansard*, there may have been some backchat across the floor as to someone imputing that someone was a liar, because I then see here somebody saying: Who are you calling a liar? But in the record we don't have it recorded that someone did indeed call someone. But again, that's a problem of the sound system and what is indeed recorded in the House. That, then, is a dispute between members, therefore not a point of order.

The Chair recognizes Calgary-Mountain View with respect to today's question period.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, I've not yet had the benefit of reviewing the Blues, but I understood the Minister of Energy to use the phrase that the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche had intentionally distorted the facts. Such a comment, I think you would find from *Beauchesne*, would be clearly unparliamentary, and if that is the case, I would ask the minister to withdraw those remarks.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has a copy of the Blues, and the exact wording was this, and perhaps the hon. minister might like to deal with it accordingly:

The other day in the House, when we were dealing with a particular piece of legislation, I informed the hon. member that prices into the United States were higher than prices into the Canadian market. Today he turns around and either distorts it intentionally or doesn't listen in terms of what the pricing situation is.

So you have it as an ambivalent thing, but perhaps the hon. minister would like to withdraw that phrase, "distorts it intentionally."

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe you read the state-

ment exactly as I said it, and of course with the way *Hansard* records it, in that I believe the hon. member either intentionally distorted the situation or didn't listen. I can only come to those two conclusions. And if the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View would listen rather than trying to indicate something different, then we would not have a waste in time in this House on points of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche is the person to . . .

MR. PIQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite upset by the minister's statement of distorting the facts, because if he checks his own records about the price of natural gas in the States, if you exclude transportation costs, American customers pay less for Alberta gas than we do here in Alberta. You should check those facts before you accuse somebody of distorting the facts. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair would briefly make the comment that when the Chair rises and is about to make a comment, the Chair also can be somewhat influenced to change the Chair's mind 180 degrees by some of the added comments that are made to either encourage or discourage the Chair, and that really does a disservice by members themselves. They should perhaps wait a tad longer to hear what the decision is. On this occasion the Chair will resist the temptation to change my mind and would ask the minister to please withdraw the three words.

DR. WEBBER: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member feels he was not intentionally distorting the facts, then I can only conclude that he was not listening, but certainly I left the option open not to say that that was the case for sure, because there was some doubt. If it would satisfy the House to withdraw that remark, fine, I will do so. But certainly there is that doubt.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Energy.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### head: WRITTEN QUESTIONS

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I move that Written Question 199 stand and retain its place on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair hesitates to interrupt, but might we have unanimous consent to vary procedure and revert to the Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House, 23 grade 6 students from Our Lady of Mt. Pleasant school in Camrose. They've been waiting patiently and, I'm sure, with great interest in the debate and lessons in how this Legislature works. They're escorted by two teachers, Mr. Joe Tuchscherer and Mrs. Cathy Brown, and two parents, Mrs. Bernie Tuchscherer and

Mrs. Bonnie Taillefer. I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They're in the members' gallery.

head: **WRITTEN QUESTIONS**

(continued)

201. Ms. Laing asked the government the following question:

- (1) What was the total number of cases registered with the maintenance enforcement program operated within the criminal justice division of the Attorney General's department at April 1, 1988?
- (2) Of that total number of cases noted in response to question (1), what was the total number of cases in respect of which
  - (a) no money had been collected under the program during the entire period of each such case's registration;
  - (b) some but not all of the money collectible prior to April 1, 1988, under the program had been collected;
  - (c) all money collectible prior to April 1, 1988, had been collected; and
  - (d) an application for variance had been made to the court by the debtor?

MR. HORSMAN: We are prepared to accept the question, Mr. Speaker.

head: **MOTIONS FOR RETURNS**

MR. YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns 190, 197, and 200 stand and retain their place on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

head: **MOTIONS OTHER THAN  
GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

220. Moved by Mr. Mitchell:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an independent public inquiry into the policies and procedures of the Workers' Compensation Board in order to assess its effectiveness in providing the maximum degree of fairness to injured workers and to employers and to recommend changes needed to enhance that effectiveness.

[Debate adjourned June 14: Mr. Mitchell speaking]

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I commenced debate on this motion on Tuesday, and I would just like to briefly summarize the points I made, add one or two other points, and then open it to debate by the hon. members in this Legislature. I trust they will participate fully and openly, particularly the Member for Red Deer-North, so we can pursue this idea to its fullest possible extent.

My motion calls for an open public inquiry into the Workers' Compensation Board operation. Certainly there has been a management consultant's report, but it is not open in public. There has been the opportunity for public input, but it has not been to those people doing the actual report and cannot be based upon the kind of information that is available through an open public inquiry. The importance of problems that Workers' Compensa-

tion Board staff and members deal with warrants that there be as much done to ensure that those problems be dealt with properly and effectively. The nature of the problems each and every one of us in our constituency offices encounter on a day-to-day basis indicates that these problems are not being handled as well as they can be handled. The danger in the kind of review process that has been undertaken by this government is that it hides the facts, inhibits the pursuit of what is really going on in the Workers' Compensation Board, for cynical political reasons to avoid political embarrassment, to sustain the government's ability to operate on a premise of cost cutting rather than service delivery, as is so important in this particular area. The consequences are not consequences we can assess in dollar and cents terms, but in human terms they deserve better. It is for that reason that we are calling for a public inquiry.

That is not to say that what has gone on is useless. It isn't. The management consultant's report raises some interesting ideas which deserve further consideration, fuller consideration, such as their idea of compensation culture versus rehabilitation. It seems to have some merit. The danger is that this government would not place the required funding emphasis on rehabilitation, and that particular idea has to be pursued properly.

The wage loss method of compensation, as proposed by the management consulting firm, again is an idea worthy of consideration. It needs to be considered properly. There are areas of weakness, however, that have not been considered adequately, if at all, by this particular management consultant's report which emphasize the need for an open public inquiry structured with representation from a variety of sectors and groups within our society.

The Workers' Compensation Board seems to be an administrative boondoggle. That's not to criticize the people who work there. It is, however, to criticize a government that has mistakenly confused cost cutting at all costs, at any costs, with positive policy-making for the future. It is not. My experience -- as, I'm sure, the experience of many of the members in this Legislature -- has been that it seems increasingly difficult to deal with the Workers' Compensation Board, not because these people are not handling their jobs as well as they can but because of the volume and the detailed nature of these kinds of problems. Time and energy that can only be provided with adequate staffing are required, and there is clear indication that that adequate staffing has been forfeited in this headlong rush to cut costs at any cost. The administrative processes have to be reviewed by this public inquiry.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Finally, one area that has not been dealt with adequately by the management consultant's report and certainly needs broader review is the question of the appeals process. Not only does this appeals process have to be fair; it must appear to be fair. I think we are all aware of the delays that have arisen with Workers' Compensation Board review of appeals. The minister has undertaken to restructure the board's appeal process, and at least he has acknowledged the problem. The danger is that he has not solved the problem, because he has not established a distinct objectivity for that appeals process. The appeals process remains within the purview of the board. It will be separated only by physically moving offices, and that appears to be frighteningly cosmetic. It is not enough simply to move that process physically. A separate reporting relationship is required, separate staffing is required, separate resources are required so that

in no way can we be led to think and injured workers be led to be concerned that the people who made the original decision which is now being appealed have an influence on the making of the appeal decision.

I leave these ideas for the consideration of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the input of my colleagues over the next 40 minutes, Member for Red Deer-North.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ready for the question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

DR. CASSIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to Motion 220. Again, I feel the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is well intended, but I also feel it's redundant at this point in time. The Premier of the province on June 26 of 1986, almost two years ago, identified the concern of the province with regard to workmen's compensation and suggested that there would be a select committee to look into the problems of workmen's compensation. The Minister of Community and Occupational Health, in a new portfolio, recognized this as well and within six months was taking some initiatives to address and to look at the problems and had identified two areas, one of which was a management problem which pertained to the processing of claims, based again on input and concerns from employers, employees, and government, and had asked a public consulting firm with a national reputation, who had finished a similar job and taken on the task with AGT and performed extremely well in that area, to try and move ahead. I appreciate some people would feel that perhaps this has been a fast-track approach, but there were a number of people that had concerns and it was felt the problem should not be delayed.

Following that, the minister also appointed Vern Millard, an individual who is well respected in the province of Alberta, the former chairman of the energy conservation board, to take on the task of meeting with constituents, people of Alberta, throughout various locations for input, recognizing that that would provide a forum for the workers and those people who have major concerns to address an independent individual who would then be able to identify the problems, present a report to the minister, and make recommendations so that some of these concerns could be dealt with in an efficient manner.

I appreciate that the member opposite would like to have a public inquiry, but let's just stop and look at that. I would have some difficulty in putting workmen's compensation through a public inquiry as one would envision the Code inquiry presently. We have to look at the cost of such an inquiry. We have to look at the time that would be required, which in fact would delay the process, not to mention the difficulties that those people working within the board would experience during this inquiry and that would further slow up the process and the administration in dealing with those workers who are injured.

It must be also stated, Mr. Speaker, in support of the Workers' Compensation Board, that 98 percent of the injuries are processed in a very short period of time. It's approximately 4 to 5 days for 48, 46 percent of the claims that are dealt with, and the majority of them are dealt with within 23 days. These are the cuts, the bruises, the burns, where an individual is off a few days and is then back to work. Our problem really deals with that other 2 percent per year of the 55,000 or so claims that

are not perhaps dealt with as satisfactorily as one would like and come to the appeal board. One must also recognize that usually these are major problems, and they're accumulative; in other words, they don't go away in a year. They deal with those individuals who have major problems and perhaps are unable to return to work.

Certainly in my past experience I've dealt with many people who had injuries, and 98 percent or more of those were dealt with very satisfactorily. But I've got a young man now, who comes to me as his MLA, who was an athlete; he had a scholarship to go off and play hockey at a university in the States. During the summer he was employed in the oil field, ended up with a major injury, crushing lower extremities, resulting in hospitalization, surgery. This young man has had ongoing problems with osteomyelitis, requiring addition surgery. Some 20 years have gone by and this individual is still depending on the workmen's compensation. Quite frankly, over that period of time he feels that perhaps he's been treated unfairly. Having listened to his story, I would concur that he hasn't had a fair hearing at times, recognizing that over that period of time he's had any number of different workers and people he's had to relate to and there have been problems with communications. I had suggested to the board that perhaps they should hire him. During this period of time, he's been able to finish his university degree. He can only sit for certain periods of time, but he probably is more knowledgeable about what goes on in the board than most of the people who are currently employed there.

So I feel that the problems are recognizable. The problems, from a standpoint of the operation and management, have been addressed and have been covered in the new document dealing with the future, *Shaping the Future*, for the workmen's compensation. I would think that the other concerns we have from the standpoint of more emphasis dealing with the rehabilitation -- that it's not just an insurance company; that we must be more aggressive and deal with those people who are injured within a matter of days or weeks. Certainly our young athletes have led the way in showing us that rehabilitation, the utilization of the services in physiotherapy, and some of the other modalities we have now within the first few days and weeks are so important, as opposed to having to wait for months and going through an appeal process and multiple referrals. It's important to be aggressive and to deal with these problems in the early stages.

The question of dealing with the benefits has to also be dealt with. It's disappointing to the worker who is unable to return to his former job because of his injury, and if he has to return to a job that he's now able to do at a lower rate, should we not be looking at topping off that rate so that he is not disadvantaged because of his injury? I think the whole question of the customer relations from the standpoint of being there to help rather than frustrate the claimant is important. I think we have to address that in so many areas besides the workmen's compensation. The people at the Workers' Compensation Board really need to work with the claimant and the employee, as well as the employer, because the employer has a vested interest here as well. He is responsible for paying the claims. We have many concerns by the employers that the cost to their industry -- they would like to be a partner of this program.

In one of my past experiences working in the United States of America, there's initiative. I remember a number of workers bringing their co-worker in and they said: "Look, do whatever you have to do. We want to get this man back on the job. There's a certain bonus if there's no lost time for accidents if it's going to affect their rate." Everybody pitched in and worked

with that individual to keep him on the job. I thought that, you know, this is a very important objective that quite often we miss. When an individual is removed from his jobsite, from the support of his co-workers, he doesn't have that support and that drive, and I think this should be reflected again in shaping the future for workmen's compensation and how we deal with those individuals. I think we also have to look at the unfunded liabilities. Again, I recognize that the minister is doing just this.

I could perhaps cover a number of the other areas, Mr. Speaker, but I think I would prefer to limit the discussion to the point of whether we need to have a public inquiry. I would think not. I would think that the minister has addressed the concerns with both the appointment of the private consulting firm to deal with the management of the office and with Mr. Vera Millard, who will deal with the concerns of the employee and the employer.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ready for the question?

Hon. Member for Redwater-Andrew.

MR. ZARUSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to speak to Motion 220, I personally don't think there was probably even a need for this motion, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has put forward. Because after the May 1986 election, our Premier did indicate that the Workers' Compensation Board would be looked into, and if some changes would have to be made, then they would be made and provisions would be taken upon by this government to help alleviate any problems there would be. At this time I don't see any need for any open public inquiries, because as indicated by the Premier's indications of a process to look into workers' compensation, three things were done. One was a releasing of a policy decision paper called Shaping the Future, the second was creating the Millard task force to receive public input on the policy decision paper, and the third one was moving ahead with organizational changes to the Workers' Compensation Board.

Now, to date all three of these -- some have been fulfilled and some are in the process of being done. The policy paper has been done and the task force is in place by Mr. Millard, and to date there were public meetings held in Edmonton. Those were May 31, June 2, June 3, and June 4, so anybody with problems had a chance to meet with Mr. Millard and discuss them and present them. There were also evening meetings scheduled and held, and those were May 31 and June 2 from 6 30 to 9:30 in the evening, and also there's been a task force secretariat put in place with a telephone number for people to call that couldn't attend the meetings to present some of their concerns. I think it would be wise at this time to have the number put in so Albertans would know. It's a toll free number, 1-800-642-3875, and I think all Albertans that didn't have a chance to attend the public meetings should know this.

I had some of my constituents call in regards to these meetings, that they'd missed them, and in recent discussions with Mr. Millard he has promised me that he is willing to meet with any group anywhere in Alberta, if there's a need. If a number of people in an area decide that they want to discuss this any further, Mr. Millard is at their disposal. He will either go out to any area in Alberta or they can come into Edmonton and meet with him. So as you can see, Mr. Speaker, I think the task force is working very well and very concerned with getting the right changes that are needed in the Workers' Compensation Board.

The House, I'm sure, is aware that the Workers' Compensa-

tion Act first was legislated on September 1 of 1908. It was the concern of the government then, obviously, that there was need to protect workers in a work force in case of an accident due to the job. It was later revised in 1918, and again I'm sure some good, prominent changes came and points that had to be changed were done. It was indicated earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark that he had seen some weaknesses in the Workers' Compensation Board and maybe the task force too. Well, you have to realize, Mr. Speaker, that an employer that hires an employee I don't think wants him to go out there and get hurt on the job, because when an employee is injured that means a loss in productivity; it means the loss of an experienced person in the company or construction or wherever it may be. So not only is it a cost to the employer of paying the premium, but also it is a cost in lost time and lost production. So we have to make sure that this is addressed in some way, and I'm sure it will be in the task force report.

I don't think it's fair to say that this government's cost-cutting measures of 1987-88 had anything to do with workmen's compensation cuts, because they were not meant for that. The government realizes that when a person is hurt or injured on the job, he's still got to keep living. He has to probably support a family and, hopefully, wants to get back to work as quickly as possible.

The appeal process was touched on, and there probably were some problems with the way the appeal process was going. I notice in the recommendations there is a new process which will be established, and that's a full-time appeals commission whose sole responsibility would be to hear appeals from injured workers and also employers, and also to establish a part-time board of directors to govern this corporation. So it seems like Mr. Millard is going in the right direction to ratify the problems with the appeal board, and I'm sure it'll work out very well.

Just touching on some of the other items that could be discussed, as I mentioned before, employers are hurt either way; whether the workmen's compensation rates go up or else if a person is injured, there is a loss to the employer. If the employee is injured, there is a loss also to his or her life-style -- and life, a lot of times -- to the life-style of the family. I'm sure it's not very pleasant when this does happen. I get many calls from the constituency from employees that get injured on the job. Basically, I guess, when you do get injured, you want to get back to work as quickly as possible. So I think most employees do want to get back to the job and do whatever they're doing well as best they can. Which brings another point into perspective on this: the rehabilitation aspect of the workmen's compensation.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. Order please. The motion before the House is to discuss -- and the operative part of the motion: "to establish an independent public inquiry." Perhaps the hon. member's comments could come back to the pros and cons of establishing what the motion is asking.

MR. ZARUSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I just got a little carried away as I was going into this. But I think this is part of whether or not to establish a public inquiry board. I still think rehabilitation is a part which would come into the public inquiry, and this board that would be established through the direction of the Millard task force, which I mentioned before, would be a full-time appeals commission and would probably take this into consideration.

So without getting any farther into this debate, as I said before, I don't think there was much reason for bringing this motion into the House today, because our government is doing a very good job at looking into the problems with the Workers' Compensation Board. Therefore, as I said before, I don't think there's any need for this motion, and I think we should not pass this motion because the mechanism is in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on this motion because the Minister of Community and Occupational Health has already commissioned a discussion paper: *Shaping the Future*. Certainly it's almost redundant, although there is a lot of controversy out there in the field from both the employees and the employers. I personally have had many people come into my office in Fairview and certainly many phone calls from both employees and employers.

In our area there is a lot of logging going on and line slashing, and the employers -- some of their rates are in the 10 to 17 percent range now -- come in and see me and say, "Well, you know, we can't afford these," and they leave. About an hour later somebody else comes, and they're really complaining bitterly that they haven't had a proper claim or a long-term disability -- or not a proper one. So it's something I've had a lot of concern with, and it's very important that the Minister of Community and Occupational Health, in fact, did commission this discussion paper. I'm sure he and all of us in this House look forward for public submissions before anything is adopted.

You know, there have been many amendments made to the workmen's compensation over the last year. I believe the workmen's compensation was started in about 1908 -- I wouldn't want to put that in as gospel -- but we've had several amendments since, and the real purpose of it is to restore injured workers to their role and to reduce human suffering due to work-related injury or diseases. You know, those kinds of people are a real burden on society, and certainly it's the workers' compensation's duty, and their willingness, too, to make sure that individuals do not be a burden on our society and also to provide the fullest range of services possible to the injured workers. Like I said earlier, many employers and employees come into my office, and really both sides are very concerned with this problem.

Some of the new amendments that have taken place over the last few years and the approaches taken have been to improve the workers' compensation system. The experience rating system was introduced. It does not increase the assessment rate for employers; rather, accident costs set the rates, and from the employers' point of view, they certainly were always in favour of that, because some employers really stress the safety of their operation. But if we've got employers -- which I hope we haven't -- but some employers often, not intentionally, don't think enough about safety factors. So I don't believe that people and employers who go for safety devices and practice safety should, in fact, be paying for those employers who, you know, are lax.

The recent improvements to the workmen's compensation system resulted from the 1983 special committee on the Workers' Compensation Act and, I believe, in May in 1984 put forth a series of recommendations in which the Workers' Compensation Board did react to 70.

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

Another improvement was the availability of information for the employees. You know, oftentimes employees were really confused; they didn't really know their rights or what they were entitled to. I personally had a person in my office here just a month ago. He's been fighting workmen's compensation since the '60s. I'm not too sure -- he's gone to the appeal once, and he's still fighting the case. I don't know whether it was from an injury, but he certainly has a disability, and I've been trying to help him out. They have an appeal board, and that's exactly what the appeal board's for. But so many people don't know their absolute rights under the Workers' Compensation Board, and I think that was another program or amendment that came in in 1984 that certainly did help employees.

I don't think I can say much more at this time except that I'm very happy with the minister for bringing in this study to look at the whole matter. I'm sure the people of Alberta have every opportunity to put their input into it, and with that kind of system we have in place now, I'm sure we will have a better Workers' Compensation Board in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, the Workers' Compensation Act, as we all know, was initially set up in 1908, and it was set up to reduce frequency in claims and try to reduce court costs. It was also set up to stop negligence, and the disputes that continued to require court settlement caused a lot of expense and hardship for injured workers. Then the Workers' Compensation Act made two changes, as my colleague before me indicated, in 1918, and at that time it established a statutory corporation operated by a board with both administrative responsibilities and decision-making ability, which is now called the Workers' Compensation Board.

It created a no-fault industrial accident insurance program funded by employers and controlled by the provincial Legislature. This means that employees had a guaranteed system of insurance for loss of income due to accidents, and employers then are relieved of the legal liabilities for negligence. In fact, the key provision of this Act is still in place. These provisions are of prompt and appropriate treatment for injury arising out of and in the course of employment. It protects the injured worker to a reasonable degree for loss of earnings because of their inability to work. It gives assistance to surviving dependants of a worker's fatality arising from employment, an acceptance of the premise that on the basis of collective employer liability, industry should be totally responsible for accidents arising out of and in the course of employment and should fully bear the results of this cost as an expense incidental to production. It is to eliminate blame as a deterrent of entitlement to benefits, an extension of a no-fault principle to both the worker and the employer.

Again, in 1986 a change in the Workers' Compensation Act occurred where an amendment was made to increase monthly minimum pension payment as well as payments to dependent children.

Pressure has mounted for a review of the Workers' Compensation Board as a result of many, many problems and concerns surrounding claims trying to find their way through various levels of bureaucratic paperwork. I myself have received many complaints from constituents who are frustrated with this bureaucratic system. There were delays in receiving final rulings and claims in other areas, major complaints for the results of these claims. From my own experience as an occupational health nurse, injuries at work were sometimes very difficult to assess. Back injury, being the most common injury in the work

force, is always a very difficult area to determine: whether this is a work related injury or whether it is an injury of perhaps poor posture, poor lifting, areas at home that encountered back-related problems, or diseases such as arthritis. So the Workers' Compensation Board had to evaluate many of these injuries in trying to determine whether or not they were, in fact, injuries as a result of the workplace or a result of something else.

As a result of the many complaints regarding the Workers' Compensation Board, the Minister of Community and Occupational Health announced as recently as March '88 changes regarding the Workers' Compensation Board. A policy discussion paper which has already been mentioned, *Shaping the Future*, has been set up, again, of course, created by the Millard task force, receiving public input on the policy discussion paper and examining organizational changes to the Workers' Compensation Board.

Also, we have before us in the House Bill 30, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 1988. I look forward to the debate on this Bill, which is now in Committee of the Whole. This Bill indicates the establishment of a part-time board of directors to govern the corporation and a full-time appeals commission whose sole responsibility would be to hear appeals from injured workers and employers.

Our minister has also indicated that a new organization of the Workers' Compensation Board will be in place by this fall. The recommendation of the Millard report will be implemented. *Shaping the Future* recommends a greater emphasis on rehabilitation for workers: restoring their physical, emotional, and vocational health. More emphasis must be placed on helping the worker to get back to work. An injured worker must be able to enter these rehabilitation programs immediately, without any delay. Intervention programs have improved, and workers' success rate has also gone up as much as 50 percent to 70 percent for early return to their jobs as a result of rehabilitative programs.

*Shaping the Future* presents a lot of new ideas. It also endorses the fundamentals of the workers' compensation no-fault insurance program: that the workers are entitled to prompt compensation when injured in the course of employment, that employers and their employees are entitled to protection from suit by workers who are disabled in the course of employment, and that the workers' compensation system is a no-fault system for which the Workers' Compensation Board has exclusive jurisdiction over the payment of claims and the collection of employer premiums.

The fundamentals of the workers' compensation no-fault insurance program have been challenged but have stood the test of time, and we don't need to change this. *Shaping the Future* is just one of those three key initiatives that this government has taken. We've launched a public consultation process already. We've introduced amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act that will be passed during this Legislature. This public consultation process has entitled Albertans to appeal or to discuss the future of the Workers' Compensation Board. I look forward to discussing Bill 30, and I feel that this motion does not require passing since we've already endorsed many, many of the programs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER:                      Member                      for  
Olds-Didsbury.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear today

that all of us that have spoken on this Bill basically seek one common thing: we're looking for a more effective workers' compensation system. There have been different views expressed here today about how best we can evaluate the system, but we all recognize just how critical it is that injured workers in this province be well served by the Workers' Compensation Board.

As we discuss how to improve the Workers' Compensation Board system, it's important that we keep in mind one of its essential features, and that is that it's been in a constant state of evolution ever since it was introduced, as the member mentioned, since 1908. We've sought only to compensate injured workers for the salary lost originally. It's gradually evolved over the years. Even though this remains our primary objective, we now take in other initiatives such as: we attempt to reduce the injured workers' suffering and we attempt to lessen the cost to society in assisting them wherever possible. We try to provide the workers with the fullest possible ranges of services and to return the employees to a productive role in society. In order to meet these changing expectations, we have had to update our legislation every four to six years since 1927. It's not surprising, then, that we find ourselves reviewing the system again here in 1988. In fact, we see almost universal acknowledgment of the need for change. Workers say that the system is arbitrary, too bureaucratic, and shortsighted in dealing with the effects of their injuries. Employers say that their premiums are too complex and the board is far too generous with their money. I'm not going to discuss these shortcomings in detail, Mr. Speaker; the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark did it quite liberally on Tuesday. But suffice it to say that there is broad agreement in the need for change.

This is not a situation that is unique to Alberta. Workers' compensation boards across Canada have gone through a series of changes in the past years in response to these challenges to the system. Ontario has introduced an independent Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal; Quebec has introduced a separate board of directors; and Manitoba is implementing its King report, which recommended changes in the approach to rehabilitation in the delivery of services. The B.C. government recently announced that it would appoint a committee to look into problems and complaints associated with its Workers' Compensation Board.

All of these explain why, as the Minister of Community and Occupational Health has already indicated several times over the past few months, we must consult with the Workers' Compensation Board, employees, employers, and other interested parties to reform this system to meet these changing times. What we all want is a sound workers' compensation system that provides Alberta workers with fair . . .

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

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

**Bill 210**  
**Mid-winter Holiday Act**

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, on rising to speak on Bill 210, the

Mid-Winter Holiday Act, I hear comments from the hon. Member for Whitecourt that for once I agree with. He's saying, "Give us a holiday." Certainly it's been a long and challenging session for all of us.

But in terms of Bill 210, Mr. Speaker, this Bill, the Mid-Winter Holiday Act, proposes that we in this Assembly amend the Employment Standards Act, section 1(g)(viii) by adding the following:

(viii.1) the third Friday of February, which shall be known by a name to be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Mid-Winter Holiday Name Act.

Now, if I might briefly refer to the Act that's being amended by this one, Mr. Speaker. For the information of all hon. members, it refers to the days that are designated in our Act as general holidays. Now, I guess those have come to be known as statutory holidays for people who are active in the work force. The general holidays that are covered under our Act in Alberta, the Employment Standards Act, currently include: New Year's Day, Good Friday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Labour Day, Thanksgiving Day, Remembrance Day, and Christmas Day. The Employment Standards Act does give this Assembly the opportunity to add to that list of course. Then there is another provision for any other day designated as a general holiday by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, under this Act.

MRS. CRIPPS: I want two weeks.

MR. FOX: Now, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley would like a couple of weeks' holiday, and we're going to do our best to ensure that she gets an extended holiday after the next election. No disrespect intended, hon. minister.

However, in terms of the Mid-Winter Holiday Act, one might ask: why would we propose such a thing? What reason would there be to propose such an Act? And I think it's fairly straightforward: because we think that it's important for this Legislature to come up with something on behalf of Albertans that will help dissipate the doldrums or beat the blahs, the mid-winter blues, as they've come to be known, Mr. Speaker; because it's a three-and-a-half- to four-month wait in the middle of the harshest part of our Alberta climate between statutory holidays. We have New Year's Day on January 1, and then Good Friday is the next statutory holiday, as I read it. Depending on when Good Friday occurs -- as you know, that varies from year to year, because Easter does that -- it may be three and a half to four months without a recognized legal public holiday, a statutory holiday. I think that's just too long.

Alberta is a challenging place to live in. It's a great place to live in, and we've become known over the years for our stamina as hardy citizens of this fine province. But I do think there would be some advantages to us approving the Mid-Winter Holiday Act so that we could break up that long, dreary period of cold, wintery weather in Alberta with another statutory holiday to give people something to look forward to.

MR. PAYNE: Name it after Karl Marx.

MR. FOX: The member for Poisson Creek suggests that we name it after one of the Marx Brothers. Harpo? Or Groucho? I'm not sure which.

But I think we have to recognize that a number of communities, Mr. Speaker, do try and create a local holiday or a local occasion, if you will, in the middle of winter to break up that long period of winter weather. Some communities, like Tofield

for example, have a winter carnival. They sponsor dogsled races. They attract people from the Northwest Territories and the Yukon and different places to come down there and take part in a dogsled derby. It's unfortunate that there hasn't been enough snow to do that really well the last couple of years, but hopefully winters will return to normal and we'll have snow. Edmonton has had some success with various carnivals and events during the month of February, Mr. Speaker. I think what we're attempting to do with the Mid-Winter Holiday Act is just provide an occasion for communities to plan around, so that people all over Alberta will have a recognized public holiday on the third Friday in February. It would kind of give some focus to the efforts that have been made by a variety of groups and communities across this province to help us enjoy and look forward to winter a little bit more. So I think the occasion is certainly there, and the need is certainly there.

The members opposite -- certainly the Member for Stony Plain, being a staunch advocate of things businesslike -- I'm sure would raise concerns about whether or not we could afford to have another statutory holiday. I think that's a concern that's got to be addressed, because certainly there would be some expense attached to having another statutory holiday, Mr. Speaker, because it's a paid holiday. Employees would be paid for that holiday even though they weren't at work. So there is an expense, no doubt.

But I think we've got to look at the benefits of having this holiday, the enhanced productivity that I think would be there by giving employees that much needed break in the middle of this three-and-a-half- to four-month period within which there are no breaks. I think the evidence is substantial, and certainly the Minister of Career Development and Employment could refer to reports that have been done or studies that he accesses that might substantiate the fact that there is indeed a direct correlation between having a little bit of time to recuperate and being, as a result, more productive in the workplace. I think there's some real merit to that, that employees would be not only invigorated by the holiday, but they'd have something to look forward to. The long days of February would not be so difficult to work through if you knew that you had a statutory holiday to look forward to, which would give you a little bit of time to spend with your family or pursue some activities that you enjoy other than work.

I think there's another aspect, though, to this midwinter holiday that ought not to be overlooked in terms of its influence on Alberta in a commercial sense, Mr. Speaker. If we're going to look at the cost to employers of having another statutory paid holiday, I think we also have to look at the economic benefit that would accrue to businesses in the province through increased tourist activity. Certainly it's been a focus of this government and one that we in the opposition don't take issue with that tourism is an industry that holds great promise for us. It's currently the third largest industry in the province, and we're all looking forward to great growth in tourism.

Perhaps the best market for tourism -- the target group, if you will, to expand tourism -- is Albertans themselves. The minister encourages people to Take an Alberta Break, and I think that's helping to develop the industry to a large degree in this province. People are learning that there's so much to see and so much to do in this great province of ours that they're not as inclined to travel elsewhere to spend their money. So I think there's definitely going to be a benefit to business and a benefit to communities around the province through increase in Alberta-based tourism, if you will, through the passage and de-



velopment of the Mid-Winter Holiday Act.

This would fit well with recent initiatives of the Minister of Tourism to expand the infrastructure for tourism in the province: the community tourism action plan, which is going to pump a great deal of money into the Vegreville constituency, to be sure. Communities are actively planning, doing the things they have to do to access that money. I think passing a midwinter holiday Act, Mr. Speaker, in conjunction with that initiative of the Minister of Tourism would really be an exciting thing, because communities in planning, in making their community tourism action plan, could decide what would be the particular focus of their community's midwinter holiday: what would they do on that day that would make their community special and give them the opportunity to attract other people, hence dollars, to their community?

I think there are a number of reasons that I can cite that support my contention and the Official Opposition's contention that we ought to have a midwinter holiday in Alberta the third Friday of February, not only in terms of everyone having a chance to enjoy themselves -- a little bit of fun and frolic in the middle of winter -- but the increase in productivity through employees being more well rested and looking forward to this little break and the enhanced opportunities for tourism.

I do look forward to some scintillating debate after this Bill passes, a couple of weeks hence when my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore introduces the Mid-Winter Holiday Name Act, because once we have a midwinter holiday, Mr. Speaker, we have to name it. It gives us an exciting opportunity to involve all Albertans in a contest to help them choose a name and have it selected. That would give the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek the opportunity to make his suggestion for a name for the midwinter holiday, put it on record, and see if it passes.

MR. PAYNE: I can hardly wait.

MR. FOX: Well, I'm sure you'll have that opportunity, hon. member.

Now, other jurisdictions do have a number of legal or public holidays. The United States has -- they call them federal legal public holidays there -- New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

In Canada, in addition to the paid public holidays that we have, there are some additional holidays that different provinces designate as holidays, Mr. Speaker. Easter Monday is often a holiday in some places but not considered a statutory holiday in the province of Alberta. Victoria Day, the 24th of May, the Queen's birthday, as we used to describe it when we were kids, is a holiday in all provinces and territories except Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Quebec has a holiday on June 24 called Fête nationale; it's kind of a birthday, I guess. Canada Day, July 1, celebrated in all provinces except Quebec. In Newfoundland it's known as Memorial Day and observed on the Monday nearest July 1.

There have been some initiatives in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, to work towards a statutory holiday in the month of August, because there is also a fairly lengthy period of time during the summer when there isn't a statutory holiday, and not all employees are fortunate enough to have their summers off or be able to have enough seniority in their place of work to get two or three weeks off during the summer months when they

can spend time with their kids. So we've made some efforts in the province to move towards a statutory holiday right in the middle of summer, August 1, in Alberta. We've come to know that as Heritage Day. In B.C. they call it B.C. Day, and in New Brunswick they call it New Brunswick Day. These are all very creative titles, Mr. Speaker. I hope we can do a little better when we debate the Mid-Winter Holiday Name Act and come up with something a little more creative than Alberta Day. Northwestern Ontario celebrates Simcoe Day.

AN HON. MEMBER: J. S. Woodsworth day.

MR. FOX: J. S. Woodsworth day? That's a fine idea. Grant Notley day would be a nice one too.

August 15 or the third Monday in August in Yukon is celebrated as Discovery Day, Mr. Speaker. Let's see; what other unique holidays do we have here? Newfoundland people are known for their ability to get down and work and produce, but they're also known for their ability to enjoy themselves and party. They have four additional holidays: St Patrick's Day, that they celebrate there March 14 or the Monday nearest March 17; St George's Day, which they celebrate on the Monday nearest April 23; Discovery Day, that they'll start to celebrate when John Crosbie discovers just how bad the free trade legislation is; and Orangemen's Day, the Monday nearest July 12. So Newfoundland has a number of other holidays. And I don't see anything wrong with Alberta taking the bold initiative of establishing a midwinter holiday to, as I said before, dissipate the doldrums and blow away the midwinter blues.

I look forward to some scintillating, positive, encouraging debate from the members opposite in this regard, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps they'll have something to add to the debate.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lacombe.

MR. R. MOORE: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Who could argue with having a day off? On the surface it sounds very good. The hon. Member for Vegreville brings out a good point, and he should bring this out. I think after last night's nomination meeting he'll be enjoying many, many days off later on. But there are people that like to work, and we don't look forward to having all that many days off.

Now, we have eight general holidays already, eight statutory holidays, and we have the other ones. There's Farmers' Day. There's the civic holiday in August. My colleague next to me from Grande Prairie tells me it's Heritage Day. I don't know whether he knows what he's talking about, Mr. Speaker, but we have Heritage Day and a civic holiday that may be one and the same, but they're holidays. There's Boxing Day. Easter Monday, as mentioned by the hon. member across the way, is recognized in a lot of businesses. So we have a lot of these holidays.

When we have a holiday, it's not without a cost. It's like everything else that people talk about if it doesn't hit them directly, it's no cost to them. But a holiday is very costly. First of all, the employer -- because we have the best labour legislation in the country, and we're improving it and I'm sure the ones across the way understand that They realize that we have traveled across the globe and brought the best legislation into this House. It's here to be utilized, and it gives these people that work their pay -- very, very generous pay -- when it comes to holidays.

Let's talk about it; let's talk about existing legislation. Now, if a holiday comes on a day that's generally worked under to-

day's legislation, Mr. Speaker, the employer must pay that employee for that day. That's only fair. And that's what I say: we have fair legislation here, just the best in the country, and the hon. Member for Vegreville knows that. That's why he's bringing such a thing forward: so they can get that pay and not have to go to work.

Supposing they do go to work. Under our legislation the employer must pay time and half. Now, that's very, very expensive. It's nice for the employee, but let's say: who pays that? You and I as the consumer pay for that, Mr. Speaker. Every one of us pays for it, including the one taking the holiday, because it comes back in the services or the goods that we pay. The cost goes up because of those input cost factors that are created by such a holiday. I don't know whether we can afford it.

I hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore talk about that cruel world out there, that cruel world where everybody is starving and everybody is -- well, whatever. Molested? I've heard all that. And here we have one of her colleagues bringing forward a motion that'll increase the input cost and eventually the cost of living for that cruel world that the people in Avonmore live in. I can't understand that. I think the hon. Member for Vegreville should talk to her about that, or she should talk to him, because surely we don't want to increase the costs for those poor people in Avonmore. No way. I'm not in favour of it anyway.

Now, let's talk about it. I heard the hon. member say, "It's great for tourism." I think that's kind of stretching the fact. I don't know, in the middle of winter, whether the Member for Vegreville will go touring around Alberta on one day off in a snowstorm, but I guess it's great for tourism. You've got to stretch your imagination.

And he talks about the productivity. I've got to think about that for a minute. I'd like the rest to think about that. It's going to increase productivity. People are going to be more productive because they have one day off in February. That's something. I can just see it. Most of my life I worked in business, and I can tell you from firsthand experience, Mr. Speaker, that the least productive days in any business are the day before a holiday and the day after. Any businessman will tell you; he knows it. They're getting ready to go on that holiday, and they're the least productive. So to talk about productivity is just ludicrous -- ludicrous. It's like everything that comes from across that way: they don't think it out and actually put it to the trial of reality. So productivity, I'm afraid, is not in this Bill. In fact, it's the opposite.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

When I think of having more days off, I think of all the unemployed people that want to work. I think about them. Here we're saying: take the people that have jobs and give them more time off. I think the majority of the people that we should be helping is to get people to work, not get them out of work. And I would think the people across the way that hypocritically say we're supporting the poor unemployed wouldn't be saying, "Let's take the unemployed and sit them at home." Let's do something more productive and get the unemployed back to work. I would think that would be the way, Mr. Speaker. I can't see them not supporting something like that. But to take the time of this House to talk about taking people out of production and sitting them at home at a cost to the consumers -- as I have said before, to increase the cost to every consumer in Alberta -- I am surprised; I am really surprised. Because this gov-

ernment is concerned about the cost of living. We're concerned about productivity. We are concerned about what is good for people, and I think a good, healthy, working clientele throughout this Alberta is better than the whole works sitting on holidays, I can tell you.

Let's compare. Would you rather have the whole province on holidays, or would you like to have a happy-go-lucky bunch working, earning their living, and not expecting somebody else to provide their living through welfare? I don't think so. I think everybody wants people to be working, not taking holidays. I think being out of work, sitting around, would be very frustrating, Mr. Speaker. I think it's not invigorating. I think working, getting up and being able to go to work in the morning feels good, just like coming into this House feels good. That's why we stay here till 1 o'clock. If it didn't feel good, we wouldn't stay here. Ask anyone around this House. I can't see why they wouldn't want to do that. It's invigorating. In fact, I can run down those stairs very fast going home at 1 o'clock, I'll tell you. That's how invigorating it is. I've got lots of life, because it's the work that does it not sitting around, sitting at home doing nothing. Why would we legislate another holiday? I just can't understand it.

Then the hon. Leader of the Opposition, not in the House today but prior, said, "You know, it'd be a great thing for the schoolchildren to name this," and the hon. Member for Vegreville started bringing out a name-the-day contest. That was a great idea -- great idea. If I couldn't think of anything more productive for the schoolchildren in Alberta to do than work on naming a holiday... If he was thinking really on the educational benefits of it I think he would say to the schoolchildren, "We'll give you an all expense paid trip around Alberta for the winner of the best essay on tourism in Alberta." Then they'd be productive; they'd learn something about Alberta. But to give them something to name a -- what pride could they have if my name got pulled out of the hat? But if they had something like that it would be more productive. But to take schoolchildren or the citizens of Alberta and ask them to name the holiday -- can you think of anything less exciting? I think we can do a lot better than that, that will project and build Alberta and use our citizens in that matter, but not to say that. I think the whole thing here that I listened to in the previous member's statements just lacked credibility. I can't say anything else, Mr. Speaker. It lacked credibility.

I'll end with the same sentence I opened with. Everybody likes a holiday. It's great. It's just like motherhood, till you think about it. So I think everybody around here will think about it now.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a hoot. I wish the Member for Lacombe would speak more often in this Assembly, because he sure tells us a lot. Do you realize that after a week of bantering from the Premier about the importance of the family, this member has just said the issue of a midwinter holiday is equivalent to motherhood? It sounds good on the surface, but you think about it and then it becomes -- what? Something you don't want to do? Is that what the Member for Lacombe was really getting at? Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think there's division in the Tory caucus on the importance of the family in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that there are a lot of

countries in the world which recognize that a frequent long weekend is actually in aid of productivity. Now, I know that the Member for Vegreville in sponsoring his Bill referred to that fact. But I note, for instance, that in Sweden, where they produce one of the best cars in the world, Volvo, there isn't ever a question about, "Oh, oh; was it made on a Monday or a Friday?" You know how that's often asked when you're going out to buy a car. And the reason that it's not asked is because there isn't a change in the productivity or in the quality of craftsmanship in the creation of the vehicles in Sweden on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday.

But one of the reasons is because they have frequent bank holidays. They actually use a different name; I'm using the English translation that I picked up when I lived in Britain. Anyway, they have them about once a month on top of other holidays: you know, the regularly scheduled ones that tend to celebrate, oh, the creation of the country or Christmas or Easter or New Year's, those sorts of things. I note that even though the United States has 10 formal holidays per year on a national basis, that's not the case in the United States, where people do worry in advance of purchasing a car on which day it was created. Now, I've often argued that there is a fallacious concept hidden underneath that, inasmuch as a car isn't created on a single day; it may be finalized on a single day. But nonetheless, people have started to come to understand that free time, Mr. Speaker, is a useful thing. It sort of re-energizes people.

Now, the Member for Lacombe says: "Jeez, are you out of your mind? Who in their right mind would want a holiday in the middle of winter?" Well, we all know that winter's a drag. It's cold, it's icy, and I for one, Mr. Speaker, would like to vote against winter altogether. Nonetheless, I happen to know a lot of people who enjoy winter, and I see the efforts of cities like Edmonton, for instance, which try on an annual basis to get people involved in outdoor activities. You know, they try to get you interested by the use of ice sculptures, and then they want to get you out on the rink to skate or, you know, out in the pass to do cross-country skiing, that sort thing. Well, me, I don't like winter. If I'm going to skate, I want it indoors so I don't have to suffer from minus 30. But I do point out that there are a lot of people who do like outdoor activities in the middle of winter.

Now, if you had a holiday in the middle of February, maybe you'd attract more people to some more long-term festivals, those outdoor festivals the likes of which even the city of Edmonton attempts to launch every year, and I suppose with some success, although it is never as successful as people would like it to be. I point out that we could make it more successful and enhance the opportunities for those people who operate ski lifts and who vend -- I don't care -- hot dogs around the outdoor skating rinks, what have you. I think it would make it attractive here in Alberta.

One of the greatest reasons that I think this is a useful thing, Mr. Speaker, is because I had a look at the statutory holidays here in Alberta. Do you realize that you go all the way from New Year's Day until Good Friday, which can happen in mid-April, without any sort of a long weekend at all? That's quite a while. Now, as you know, Mr. Speaker, a lot of people can afford to take a winter holiday, and they go off to Hawaii or Mexico or what have you. But there are a lot of people who can't afford that, and it would be nice for them to have that additional day. Gee, you never know; it might actually contribute to the success of the Participaction campaign, getting people outdoors doing active things, if they know they've got that spare day.

I'm a single person, Mr. Speaker, and even though I don't usually get days off on the weekend, the hours that I get off on the weekend, you know, I've got to scramble to get the laundry done, to pay the bills, to do whatever else I have to get done just in order to function. Just think what it's like if you're a parent with children. I mean, there's really no time to enjoy yourself unless you've got a special day that comes along every so often in which you know you can do your other work around that day so that you get to have that day off. Mr. Speaker, it used to be that Sundays were like that. But that's not the case in Alberta anymore because the Alberta government has never adopted our private member's Bill or our motion or our policy to basically prevent widespread retail operation on Sundays. So a lot of people now have to go to work on Sundays, as a matter of fact.

Now, the Member for Lacombe got up, and he said that we're in the province with the best labour legislation. I think that's a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker, and I know that the contents of this motion are not the context in which we'd want to engender that debate. But I'd point out that we have a 44-hour workweek here. Do you realize how long people have been fighting for a shorter workweek? You know, people thought that they'd attained a victory 70 years ago when they so-called won the 40-hour workweek, and we still have the 44-hour workweek here in Alberta.

The member says, "Well, you're going to create further unemployment." No, Mr. Speaker, you don't create further unemployment by having an additional statutory holiday. You create a happier environment in which people become more productive. You don't have to lay off one single individual. I defy the Member for Lacombe or anybody else on the government side to come to me with a multiplier effect that would show any significant increase in the rate of inflation or reduction in the rate of employment before I'd be convinced of their arguments. The reason I defy them to do so is because I understand econometric models, and I know the insignificance of one day out of 365, and I know that they can't prove that to me.

So I ask myself then: what was the validity in the Lacombe member's arguments? He says: "What about the unemployed? What about those people who want to work?" Mr. Speaker, there's been practically nothing else occupying my mind over, I guess, the last seven or eight years in this province. I mean, certainly the greatest problem facing Albertans is unemployment. I have argued, coming as I do with an economics background, that the very smart thing to do is that which has been done in Japan, in Sweden, in West Germany, and in other progressive countries. That is, provide incentives, usually through tax incentives, for work sharing; that's one thing. And also provide incentives for a shorter workweek. You don't even have to legislate it; you can provide incentives for a shorter workweek.

What that does is create more job opportunities for people. You don't look at a reduction in the amount of work that's being done; you look at a reduction in the amount of hours performed to accomplish those ends by an individual. If you reduce the hours in the workweek, you necessarily have to find more people to fill those other spaces. It necessarily creates more employment. So I think that's a wonderful idea that the member should listen to and adopt if he really wants to tackle unemployment as a long-term, protracted problem, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I point out that there's another Bill on holidays that has never been accepted by the Conservative members, and it's been proposed by the Official Opposition New Democrats. Well, I mean, who else would you expect to propose progressive legislation, Mr. Speaker? That is the Religious and Ethnic Holidays

Act. What that calls for is a legal right for an employee to ask her or his employer, with a month's notice, for a designated day off either without pay or the time to be returned to the employer -- that is, time off in lieu of -- so that person can recognize in her or his own way, but usually in a collective group way, a significant day of worship or a significant day of ethnic consideration. That Bill has never been accepted by the government members. In lieu of that, I would say: why don't we start by recognizing that people really do appreciate and give back all that they get and then some from having an additional day off every once in a while, usually in the form of a long weekend?

I wonder if the hon. Member for Lacombe, who railed so adamantly against this concept, would like to propose that we reduce the statutory holidays. Remember that he made that fallacious argument: oh, give him another holiday, you'll cause inflation to go up and unemployment to go up. If he really believes that, then I expect an initiative from that member that we reduce our statutory holidays in the name of decreasing inflationary tendencies and promoting further employment in Alberta. I don't think he will but that's because I don't think he can.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I point out that just a few months ago here in this province February was a very successful month. We got people from all over the world participating in outdoor sports, and the occasion, of course, was the international Olympics held in Calgary. Now, I think that proves once and for all that there's no legitimacy to the argument that people don't want to be out in the winter. I acknowledge that I'm in a minority, Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as I don't want to be out in the winter under any circumstances. But there are a lot of people who do, and they've demonstrated that. They came in droves to Calgary, and they came in droves to observe, not just to participate, which goes to show the people are willing to sit outside or stand outside to watch nice sports events. I'll bet you they'd do it for cultural events as well.

Those are good reasons, as far as I'm concerned, for instituting this sort of a holiday. We're not asking for the world. We're asking for recognition that in the middle of winter in our frozen northland three and a half to four months without any sort of statutory long weekend at all is too long. It simply is too long a break, Mr. Speaker. People get restless, they get cranky, they become unproductive, and they can hardly wait until Easter. You know what? The first holiday of Easter is, in the Christian world, in a way the most sad day of the entire world, because what's being acknowledged is the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Even still, people are glad to get to that day, sad though it is, just because it finally constitutes a holiday. Now, of course, there's celebration three days later because of the Resurrection, but that's not the point. They look forward to the Friday not because of its religious significance anymore, but because it's a day off and they can finally, you know, heave a sigh of relief after three and a half months of darkness outside and endless snowflakes and all that cold and all that wind and all those things that I personally can't stand.

Now, I'd like to conclude my argument, Mr. Speaker, by referring to one final comment that the Member for Lacombe made. He says, "Ah gee, you know, first you want a holiday, and now you can't think of anything better to do than get kids to go out and get into a contest and name this holiday." I can think of lots of things better to do, Mr. Speaker, and I've been doing them in the context of Bills 21 and 22 during the last week and a half. I intend to keep up that pace, and I'll let the hon. gentleman leave any time he wants. In fact, I'd look forward to the

New Democrats constituting a majority in the House on any given occasion so that we can defeat those Bills, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Or rescind them.

MS BARRETT: That's right. But I point out that this is the man who's obviously got nothing better to do than to name a particular animal as a special emblem of Alberta: the bighorn sheep, if I'm not mistaken.

Then the member says, "And then what are you going to do? Are you going to send all these kids on a tour of Alberta? How much is that going to cost?" I humbly submit that it's going to cost a fraction of what it cost to send the Labour minister and his entourage of 13 around the world on a tour, Mr. Speaker.

So I conclude by saying that at an initial theoretical level people may have misgivings about this sort of Bill. Ask them that again in the middle of February, and I'll bet you that you'd get resounding support for this initiative; not just in mid-February when it's first adopted but year-round thereafter.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Millican.

MR. SHRAKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I came here today prepared to speak for this very wonderful Bill, because I felt it was a very important Bill. I don't think we've had many with the very heavy consequence of this, but I had to do some homework. First off, I'm very surprised the NDP are introducing a Bill that would create a holiday, considering that they've sat here so many nights as they repeated the same thing over and over and over and over. I thought goodness, I don't think they want me to get a holiday.

Anyway, I went and did a little homework here to check it out and see what the people out there want. Do they want this holiday? In doing a little checking I found that Canada's got a population of 25,000,002 people. They've got 9.93 million people over 65, and that only leaves 15,070,002 people to do all the work. Also, there are 8.92 million that are under 16 years old, so that only leaves us 6,150,002 people to do all this work. I did a little checking around, and holy smokers, we've got 1.82 million government employees. That only leaves 4,330,002 people to do all this work. We've got 360,000 in the military, and that cuts it down to 3,970,002 people to do the work. Now, we've got 1,310,000 that work for all the provinces, municipalities, counties, cities, towns, villages, and hamlets. Oh, boy. That cuts us back to 2,560,002 people to do all the work. Now, we've got 620,000 people in hospitals, asylums and clinics, so that cuts us down. At this point we're down to only 1,940,002 people to do all this work in this country.

Now, it just may interest you to know that we've got 540,000 out of this country at any one time.

AN HON. MEMBER: On holidays.

MR. SHRAKE: Well, they're out somewhere.

That only leaves 1,500,002 people to do all this work. Now, in this country for some reason we've got 172,000 lawyers, so again that cuts it down to 1,328,002 people to do all this work. We've got 89,000 off on workers' compensation; that cuts us down further. We've got 921,000 full-time students, which only leaves us 218,002 people to do all the work.

Now here's the real bad news, folks: there are 218,000 people in the jails, prisons, institutions, and there are only two people left to do all the work in this country. So I got hold of these

two people and asked them, "Do you want that holiday or not?" They said no. They said, "We've got to keep working because we owe \$100 billion that that federal government's created out there, and we've got to work like heck, so we'll just keep working on that day."

Now, this Bill here establishes -- I wasn't sure why, and they asked me, and I said, "I'm not sure." I'm not sure too many of the members -- in fact, I'm not even sure the member that's the author of this Bill is sure why he wants it, so I couldn't explain to them. The best I could say was that it would just create a holiday for the sake of a holiday. Those two folks said that they're a little tired, but they don't need a holiday just for the sake of a holiday.

They asked me, "What in the world are you going to call that Bill you're going to create?" I said, "Well, I think really we should name that Bill after Wayne Gretzky, the world's greatest hockey player." Unfortunately, one of those two people is from Calgary, and no matter what I said, I couldn't convince him that we should call it the Wayne Gretzky holiday. Unfortunately, he's, you know, a Flames fan, and he really got cheesed off and said: no way. He said that after what the Oilers did to the Flames last time, he'd never agree to calling this holiday after Wayne Gretzky. So I did suggest Lanny McDonald there, but unfortunately the other guy -- guess what? -- he's from Edmonton, and he wouldn't agree to that.

So I mentioned to him that we had some pretty nice things in this Bill about selecting this name. Maybe we'd just have a contest, and whoever came up with the best name -- we'd stay away from Gretzky and from Lanny McDonald. Perhaps we'd have a contest through the whole province. I guess the government would pay for it. I don't know who else would pay. It would be the government, I guess. And whoever would get a three-day holiday and a mule package anywhere in the province. They thought it over a little bit, and they said, "Well, it would maybe be better if we took some of that money and gave it to one of the food banks or gave a little for the needy." Now, I agreed that that sounded a little more logical. Maybe we'd better not be wasting money, because those two guys are getting pretty tired of all this.

The NDP has allotted, I guess, two days of debate on this private members' Bill on this issue of creating a new holiday. So they asked me, "Was it really that important there?" They wanted to know why in the world we'd waste two days on that. I'm afraid I didn't really have a good answer. I said that I would ask the hon. member if he did have a reason why he wanted to spend that much time on the debate on this.

MS BARRETT: You should have told him the truth: two hours.

MR. SHRAKE: Well, okay.

Anyway, these people tried to explain to me as best they could there that sometimes your small businesses do have trouble. When you give these paid holidays, it costs them money. It has to be paid for basically out of their revenue, and some of these small businesses have had it tough. They quoted the old Chamber of Commerce president up here in Edmonton, and I guess they said he was saying that it was exceedingly inappropriate at this time, given the economic circumstances and our competitive position. They seemed to have a high regard for the president of that Chamber of Commerce. They also noted that some small businesses are pretty vulnerable right now. They don't have any extra money to be taking the extra

holiday.

So, Mr. Speaker, perhaps it would not be a good idea. I know the member that brought this Bill was thinking that in the middle of February, when it's kind of cold and miserable, it'd be mighty nice to give everybody a day off, maybe get a few extra votes from all these people out here because they got this extra holiday. But those two people said that if you put that in your platform there, they're not really going to give you the vote over that. You know: "Vote for us; we give you more holidays. The government and the old big capitalist owners will have to pay for it." But those two working folks thought they would have to pay for it, so they didn't really want to go along with that. Now, I know the other side of the House -- I guess the side I'm sitting on here -- is not used to thinking about how the money may be needed to implement more important things, but sometimes this has to be done. You have to spend the money for these more important things.

Now, average Albertans, if you take their wages and you multiply the average wage by the number of employees working in this province, the cost of this general holiday is approximately \$102 million. This figure doesn't include the cost of having to pay the time and a half or double time for those who do have that kind of a union contract. This impacts mostly back on government, the public service. You can't say: well, we'll have a day where we'll let all the police off, the fire department guys, the hospitals. Some of the essential services, regardless of whether you declare a holiday or not have to be there. The hospitals cannot close on holidays; the police don't go home on holidays. They must keep on working.

So I think that in respect of the two people I talked to, I will urge members to vote against this Bill.

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

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a few comments. Before I get into some of the comments I want to make in favour of the Bill, perhaps I'd like to respond to comments made against the Bill. Although I suppose I should feel a little guilty about responding to comments that made so little sense, I will anyway.

One member pointed out who would want to take a holiday in the middle of winter anyway? He should look around the province of Alberta and look at the number of places that are designed to appeal to tourists in the middle of winter. Sunshine Village, Marmot Basin, Fortress, Canyon ski hill, and so on and so forth. They're winter holiday places. They're places tourists go to in the winter. Now, I'd like to ask that member where he thinks Sunshine Village and others would be if it weren't for winter and snow. Well, maybe a lot of them would be like Mount Allan if it weren't for the snowmaking equipment. But that notwithstanding, they are designed for winter, and there would certainly be a boost for them if there were that holiday in the middle of winter for people to go use them a little more.

One member pointed out the cost. I believe he said that \$102 million would be the cost of the holiday, as if somebody were going to take \$102 million and stuff it down the toilet and flush it and it would disappear. Certainly he must realize that that \$102 million is going to be circulating in the economy, and those people are going to be spending it on their one-day holiday. In fact I would suggest that it's entirely possible that if we used the kind of economic multiplier effect that the Minister of the Environment used on the Oldman dam, we could demon-

strate that that one holiday would completely eradicate economic distress and unemployment in the province by the time we got through the multitudes of multiplications, although I would want us to use a slightly more accurate and economically sensible formula than was used for the Oldman dam.

One of the hon. members said that people are happier when they're working. Well, let's extend that argument a little farther, then, if he's accurate. I would question whether that's totally accurate or not. He said: you don't want to give them a holiday; they're happier when they're working. So let's get rid of coffee breaks. After all, if they're happier when they're working, why hurt these people and make them unhappy with a 15-minute coffee break when they'll be more productive if we make them work right through the morning? In fact, let's cut lunch hour down to 10 minutes. They can gobble their lunch and get back to the happiness of working, and they'll be more productive by the member's logic. We can get them to work 18 hours a day -- some of them will think they're MLAs -- and we can make them really happy.

Now, I would argue that the member's logic is completely senseless, and they are not going to be happier because we make their working conditions less enjoyable and more unpleasant. In fact there's a lot of research to indicate that they will be happier if their working conditions are pleasant and if breaks -- whether they're breaks during the day or breaks during a month or breaks during a year, those breaks improve productivity and make for happier employees. So I would argue that in fact you're going to do a lot to improve the economy and to improve productivity if you do that.

I wondered if perhaps the Member for Lacombe wasn't just a little bit annoyed that we were dealing with this one. He'd rather jump a couple of Bills and get to 212, An Act to Amend the Emblems of Alberta Act. Well, I would suggest that he get in on the contest and try to get the new holiday named the bighorn sheep day, and then he could have a companion holiday to the emblem he's pushing for. Mind you, I would also argue that anything he can say to insult this Bill that we're discussing as being senseless can be applied to his own as well, so he should be careful about exactly how strongly he words those kinds of arguments.

I think there is very definitely a need for a midwinter holiday. I'm sure the Minister of Education would likely support me on that. Certainly if she talks to teachers and asks them what the behaviour of students is like in the middle of February, then she would agree that perhaps if they were looking forward to a holiday there, they might be a little more productive as students. Their assignments would be written a little better in a little less time, and the behaviour problems teachers put up with would be a little less frequent. Because, after all, the teachers say: "Well, I know that you're a little bored. You're on the bus when it's dark, and you're going home on the bus when it's dark because daylight is so short in this northern climate, but you're going to have that three-day weekend in February to help you get through the blahs." We might find students would be a lot more productive and a lot happier. Certainly in my 14 years as a teacher I found that those were very difficult teaching months, much more difficult than other teaching months. So I think that holiday for working people would be very helpful from that point of view.

I think we've got to look at another factor. We go a very long time from the Christmas holiday, including New Year's, to the Easter holiday. Now, those are holidays that for many are a little longer than just a three-day weekend, but it doesn't make

up for that three- to three-and-a-half-month stretch without any kind of holiday at all.

We also have to look at the fact that although for most people that Christmas holiday is a time of family getting together and joy, for others it's not. It's a time of stress, whether it's real stress or artificially created stress. Whether it's the stress of crowds shopping for Christmas presents or the stress that you don't have enough money to go shopping for Christmas presents for your children or whether it's the stress of not having family to share that Christmastime with, there are a lot of sources of stress through that time. Many people almost need a holiday in very early January just to recover from Christmas because of that kind of stress. For many people it's not so much of a holiday as we would think, and then they're looking at a very, very long time before there's another one. So I think we have to look at that as a very real thing.

Another aspect we seldom look at in the need for a midwinter holiday is just what it's like living in a northern climate. Now, I live in Alberta by choice. I've lived in five provinces in Canada, and this is the one I choose to live in, the one I most enjoy living in. I find that hard to believe in the middle of February many years, but it's the truth.

The city of Edmonton, as I recall, hosted a conference or symposium on winter cities and life in winter cities and things that can be done to make life better in winter cities. It attracted people from all over the northern part of the planet people who live in those northern winter climates. They came together to look at ways that we could make winter a little less of a depressing time. We see a lot of people depressed just by the lack of sunlight at that time, and it's a serious psychological and medical problem for some people. I've known people who do suffer from it and it can be a big problem.

Now, when we start looking at what we can do to make that wintertime, that most stressful, most difficult time of living in this northern climate -- I think what we're doing here is giving a very serious suggestion of one way, one very small way, one way that can be economically beneficial to the economy as a whole to reduce those winter blahs and to make a winter holiday, not where you give a week so people can go to Las Vegas or Palm Springs to golf and perhaps run into the Premier. But you give a time when they can have a winter holiday in their winter climate, and we can start boosting the kind of winter activities that people can do here.

Now, if we do that kind of thing, perhaps we should research how much economic spin-off there would be just by boosting people's recognition of the value and the fun of winter activities. Conservatives argued for a long time that the Olympics were going to do that, and it justified those momentous expenditures because we would have that run-on effect that people would love these winter activities and take part in them . . .

MRS. CRIPPS: On the Bill, second reading.

MR. YOUNIE: I'm pointing out the arguments you gave as the government that in fact support the need for this midwinter holiday. I think it is very valuable. I think it would be a very complementary kind of thing to do to pass this and add to the value that the Winter Olympics brought us. It would go one more step to increasing winter tourism in Alberta.

I'm sure that at some future point we can count on all members of the Legislature to support this Bill, which would give Albertans who manage to survive the winter and love the summer a holiday that would help them survive the winter a little

more easily and maybe even get to like it. But for now, in view of the hour, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry that we adjourn debate. All in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

MRS. CRIPPS: Mr. Speaker, when the House reconvenes this evening, we'll be in second reading of Bills.

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

