

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Title: **Tuesday, August 15, 1989 2:30 p.m.**
 Date: 89/08/15

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRAYERS

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us both strength and wisdom.

Amen.

head: **READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the three petitions I've presented within the last week be read and received, please.

CLERK:

Petition to the Legislative Assembly:

We, the undersigned, request that the Assembly direct the government to establish Toddler Talk programs province-wide as part of its initiative to strengthen the family.

Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to take whatever steps are necessary to establish equity and fairness with respect to the busing of school children to French Immersion Programs in Edmonton.

To the Honourable, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in Legislature Assembled:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Honourable Assembly take whatever steps necessary to insure that Provincial Approvals of the Regional Sanitary Landfill proposed for the Pine Lake area . . . be denied.

head: **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS****Bill 22****Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 1989**

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 22, being the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 1989.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to delay for one year the appointment of the Electoral Boundaries Commission in order to permit the work of a select special committee which will be the subject of a motion which I will move later in this Assembly, to permit them to deal with issues affecting the legislation in question.

[Leave granted; Bill 22 read a first time]

Bill 24**Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, 1989**

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

24, the Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, 1989.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to a number of relatively minor issues, this Act will provide the Members' Services Committee with the responsibility of dealing with the question of members' indemnities and the salaries paid to the members of Executive Council and others and other related expense issues.

[Leave granted; Bill 24 read a first time]

head: **INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

MR. SCHUMACHER: Mr. Speaker it is my privilege today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three visitors from Manitoba. They are Suzanne Dion, the editor of *Hansard* for the Legislature in Manitoba, and Brenda Walker and Joyce Metelski, who are with her. I'd ask them to rise in your gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

MR. ZARUSKY: I'd like to introduce to you and to the rest of the Assembly the mayor of Lamont, a good friend of mine, Mr. Steve Andrais. He's visiting here on some town matters. He's seated in the members' gallery. I ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce the chairman of the Medicine Hat College board, Mr. Orval Shantz, who's seated in the members' gallery. I would like him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you several gentlemen who are involved in and directly associated with the Alberta Cancer Board. Seated in the members' gallery is Dr. Phil Gold, who is the chairman of the evaluation team on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund applied cancer research initiatives program of the Alberta Cancer Board. In addition to being a world authority in his scientific work in cancer, he was also the recipient of the inaugural Ernest Manning foundation award in 1982 by the province of Alberta. Dr. Michael Baker is the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Research of the Alberta Cancer Board. He is the director of the oncology program at the Toronto General hospital and a professor of medicine at the University of Toronto. Mr. Art Davis is the chairman of our own Alberta Cancer Board and is accompanied by Mr. Vic Douglas, a trustee on that board, and Jean-Michel Turc, who is the president of the Alberta Cancer Board. All of these distinguished people are in our members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Belmont

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a friend of mine who's visiting Edmonton from Kenora, Ontario. Mr. Bill Griffith is sitting in the public gallery, and I ask that he rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you today two individuals from Red Deer who dedicate themselves to addressing both the emergency and the long-term solutions to violence in the family; they were here making a presentation

today: Miss Mary Boyd of the Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter and Mr. Jim Freeman of the Central Alberta Group Psychotherapy Centre. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House today.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce, seated in your gallery, the member who at one time graced the floor of this Assembly as the Member for Calgary-Millican. Would members greet once again a high and lifted up Tom Donnelly.

head: ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Corporate Income Tax

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the Provincial Treasurer. The Provincial Treasurer has basically only one answer when you suggest that large corporations should pay their fair share of taxes. He tells us that investment would flee the province, as he puts on his nice ties. We can see it all now: ask for a fair share and they'll all pack up and leave, maybe to the forests of Prince Edward Island, to the oil and gas fields of Manitoba, maybe to the tar sands of northern Ontario. The fact of the matter is that the darling of the Progressive Conservatives from Alberta, Mr. Ronald Reagan, used the minimum tax to put thousands of corporations back on the American tax rolls, and guess what? They're still doing business in the United States and still making a dollar. Mr. Speaker, it's time the Provincial Treasurer looked at his \$10 billion debt, forgot the rhetoric for the time being, and gave us a taxation system which is fair to all people, including the corporate sector. A very straightforward question to the Treasurer. When will the Treasurer bring in a fair taxation system so that corporations start to pay their fair share in this province?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me indicate a fundamental principle that stands the test if a corporation or an individual makes income, then they pay tax. Alberta has one of the fairest tax systems that there is. Albertans understand that we have the lowest tax regime possible on the personal side. We intend to maintain that with no sales tax. At the same time, in 1987 I required corporations to increase their tax load by approximately 35 percent on the rate base. Now, if members think about what the Member for Edmonton-Norwood is suggesting across there, to have a minimum tax for corporations, he would quickly come to the conclusion that that means that even without an income, the corporation would have to pay tax, and that becomes exactly close to their form of capital tax, which is the kind of confiscatory policy that would in fact drive investment from this province.

Now, the member likes to mention the conservative regime in the United States, who were in fact supply-siders, similar to this government. I'd like the member to continue in that line of thinking at least, but he should also go a little bit further. Remember that the Bush administration just recently introduced a Bill to reduce capital gains. I wonder how he would respond to that.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't get my orders from Mr. Bush, unlike the Treasurer.

My question, then, a very simple straightforward question. Given that every province in Canada except Alberta has a capi-

tal tax on large financial institutions -- and I might remind the Treasurer that they're still doing business in those provinces, Mr. Speaker -- would the Treasurer commit himself here today to bring in this sort of tax in the next budget year?

MR. JOHNSTON: No, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans should be aware of what's happening from the socialist party across the way. In listening to their speeches over the past few days here and in fact over the past year, it's very clear that their policy would be a policy of capital taxes. Capital taxes. Now, they would tax the capital of the corporation. They would tax the estates of poor senior citizens trying to leave some bequest to their families: a house tax, a capital tax. They would confiscate the incentive that Albertans have to save and invest. That's fundamentally what their policies would do. There's no question about it Mr. Speaker. . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Speech, speech.

MR. SPEAKER: Final, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: No. The Leader of the Opposition. Thank you, Provincial Treasurer.

MS BARRETT: Tough luck, Dick. Deficit Dick.

MR. SPEAKER: Let's get on with the question.

MR. MARTIN: If it wasn't so sad, this would be funny, Mr. Speaker.

Let me remind this Treasurer, Mr. Speaker, besides all the silly rhetoric, that this province is \$10 billion in debt and I want to ask the Treasurer: why does he stubbornly refuse to look at a fair taxation proposal with this debt? Is it because of the triumph of ideology over common sense?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true that this is a commonsense fiscal approach to what this province has laid before Albertans, a policy which is one of carefully managing the resources of this government ensuring that we move to a balanced budget by 1992, maintaining the lowest possible tax regime for individuals in this province, and in fact removing about 500,000 Albertans under the selective tax reduction program, freeing up the regressive end of that tax regime. Let me make it very clear again, as I've done on other occasions, that when the economic health continues to return to this province, as is now happening with new investment with new profits, and with new jobs -- because the only way that can happen is if the private sector has an opportunity to invest here -- then you'll see the tax flow to this province. Already the diversification is in place, Mr. Speaker. Our revenues are now very well balanced as between taxation and resource revenue, and in fact the corporate tax side is starting to pay more.

Now, the astounding fact is that under a continued regime of economic health with new investment and with profits going to the private sector, corporations in Alberta will pay a far larger share of the total tax paid in this province than in fact on a per capita basis; 25 percent, as I've said before, in 1985. We want

the private sector to invest here. We like the word profits. We like the words corporate taxation. It's happening in this . . .

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

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I think his fancy tie has got to his brain.

I'd like to designate my second question to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Highlands

Cruise Missile Testing in Alberta

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The guidance systems in the air-launched cruise missile were known by the U.S. government as long ago as 1987 to be suffering from critical manufacturing flaws. The U.S. Air Force recently randomly tested 31 of them and found a quarter of them in fact to be faulty. The manufacturer admits that the flight data transmitter is an absolutely critical component to the steering system. Recently the subcontracted chief engineer has pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges, and others related to the manufacturing have also been indicted. Basically the manufacturers cut corners and made the product completely unsafe, particularly in cold weather, which is where they're tested in Alberta. I'd like to ask the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs if during the last two years he knew about these serious defects in the guidance systems themselves and still let them fly over Alberta, or did he unknowingly put Albertans at risk?

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, the question of flying over Alberta is a matter of the responsibility of the federal government and the Department of National Defence, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands well knows. It has, of course, been the responsibility of my ministry to work with the Department of National Defence in matters relating to the issue of military testing and military bases, and it has been our understanding throughout that the federal government and its responsibilities for national defence are being properly monitored and carried out by experts within that particular branch of the federal government.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MS BARRETT: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister saying basically that he's going to continue to blindly adhere to this curse called the Trudeau/Louheed pact, or is he going to ask his federal counterparts why he hasn't been informed of the flaws in this equipment prior to it flying over Alberta?

MR. HORSMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has used some unusual terminology that I hadn't heard before: the curse of the Trudeau/Louheed pact. I'm not sure which one she's referring to.

Mr. Speaker, I have had no knowledge of any of those agreements entered into by the federal government and the government of Alberta being cursed by anyone with reason.

MR. SPEAKER: Final.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, what a flimsy response. I thought the guy was supposed to be in charge here.

Yes, my final supplementary to the minister is this. Given the facts of the matter, will the minister now call his federal master in Ottawa and tell him to tell the U.S. Air Force that the deal is off, that Albertans don't want this unsafe equipment flying over our province?

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which master she's referring to, because I can assure members of the Assembly that this minister doesn't regard any minister, or other person for that matter, in Ottawa as being a master of this government or of the Department of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs. However, I will say this. It has been a matter of concern to our government as to the property and the safety of individuals and Albertans as to this subject of carrying out military testing within Alberta, whether it be surface military testing on military ranges or testing which takes place in the air above the province. Issues of concern which are legitimately raised will certainly be taken under consideration with the federal government.

I must say this, Mr. Speaker. We have had careful consultation with the federal government on this and other military issues. It has been my experience that they have carried out their responsibilities with great concern for the lives and the safety of Albertans and for the property of Albertans. Unlike some in this Assembly, the NDP in particular, our government believes that we do need to have a strong defence and alliances with our neighbours in NORAD and in NATO, and we are not prepared to cast ourselves alone in the world. We will work with the federal government to ensure that a valid national defence policy is maintained for Albertans and Canadians.

Senate Reform

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, Albertans overwhelmingly endorse the idea of electing their own Senator. Unfortunately, when our Premier promoted Alberta's wishes recently, the Prime Minister of our country threw the Premier's signature on the Meech Lake accord back in his face, because, as he noted, the accord calls for a list of names to be submitted to the federal government. So much for the Prime Minister's democratic spirit. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is this: what specific action does the Premier intend to take with respect to the Prime Minister's response? Is the Premier prepared to accept that insult?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find the hon. member's allegations pretty incorrect. We had the Prime Minister of Canada visit us. He spent considerable time on a Saturday afternoon in Red Deer. We covered a whole range of federal/provincial issues. We were able to agree on many of them, many in a way that will provide lasting benefits to the people of Alberta and I think therefore will strengthen Canada as well. There were several issues on which we did not agree completely, and we've talked about those publicly. It's not a matter of the Prime Minister insulting this province in any way. The Prime Minister has a position regarding Meech Lake, and the government of Alberta has a position regarding how to select a Senator.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I didn't ask for an agenda review. I wanted specific action that the Premier intended to take. I

think Albertans are interested in that.

My second question to the Premier is this: given that people who run for the Senate seat could be forced to give up their jobs, what assurances can the Premier give candidates that when elected, they won't be hung out to dry when the Prime Minister snubs Alberta and continues to demand a list, as per the Meech Lake accord?

MR. GETTY: I find it remarkable, again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member participated in the debate in this Legislature as the Bill progressed through several readings and committee study and is now at the third reading stage. There has been complete discussion with the member who has been leading the Bill, the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs. The very issue has been discussed in the House, and the Legislature has then passed the legislation through the committee stage to third reading. There was a very good discussion on the matter. Mr. Speaker, I think all Albertans know where we stand. We have presented legislation, and hopefully this Legislature will endorse it

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, maybe I'm not making myself heard over there. The question was to give assurances to the candidates. I know that we are engaged in the debate.

Let me try this one, Mr. Premier. The last question for the Premier is this: considering the importance that Albertans attach to having complete control over who becomes their Senator, is the Premier willing to provide financial resources for the winner or the nominee until such time as the Prime Minister endorses that winner or nominee?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a hypothetical situation which I wouldn't try and speculate on now. I would only say that the key behind the Bill is that we are providing for the first time in history an opportunity for the people of Alberta to determine who they would like to have representing them in the Senate. It's never been done before. It's breaking new ground; it's historic in our country. We are going to continue to pursue this initiative, and I know it has the support of Albertans.

Victims of Family Violence

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I understand that up to one in eight women are believed to suffer abuse, quite often serious abuse, at the hands of their husbands or their common-law spouses. I would like to know what action the Minister of Family and Social Services has taken to provide safety for these women in light of the throne speech commitment that indeed these protective services would be provided for women.

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, the member brings to the attention of this Assembly a very serious problem in Alberta and indeed in Canada today. I would want to say at the outset that this government, in co-operation with Albertans, with a tremendous amount of volunteers, has worked in a very meaningful way to address this problem. This year, as the member would know, we announced a 24 percent increase in funding to women's shelters, coupled with a number of innovative projects that we've piloted throughout the province. In fact, in the members' gallery today we introduced some guests from the Central Alberta Group Psychotherapy Centre, who are doing some very innovative research in this direction. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I

was very pleased to be able to announce \$270,000 in funding for six new satellite agencies to be located throughout the north of this province. It's a first in Alberta. Add to that a commitment for a women's shelter in Peace River as well.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear the minister speak to these new initiatives. Could you tell the House where these satellites are located and how the location of these satellites came about, please?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, in terms of determining the locations, obviously it was, first of all, based on the evidence of need, it was based on the amount of community support -- and I alluded a little earlier to the importance of having that community involvement -- and of course it was based on the proximity to other resources, after careful consultation as well with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, who have worked very closely with this government in assessing these needs and priorities.

MR. TAYLOR: Where are they? You forgot to answer.

MR. SPEAKER: Final, Smoky River. Smoky River, through the Chair, please.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's satisfying to hear that these services are being made available.

My question basically is: are there any preventative actions being taken to see that, indeed, these services will not be needed in the future? If there are, could you please give us some insight as to what they are?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon was able to supplement that second question and remind me to share with the Assembly where these shelters are located. They're located in Grande Cache, High Level, Fairview, Whitecourt, Lac La Biche, Athabasca, and St. Paul. I might add that we've had some very positive feedback from those communities already, and they are extremely well received.

The member brings up a very important point, Mr. Speaker. It's one thing to take remedial steps to deal with an existing problem, but are there steps that we can take of a preventative nature to see if we can't put an end to this situation before it even begins? Again I'm very pleased that last week I was able to announce \$200,000 in funding for the community-based family violence prevention project fund. I'm really looking forward to again seeing Albertans respond, because there's a tremendous amount of talent and resources out there and people who share this concern, and they're prepared to work with this government in a meaningful way to address it. I've seen some very innovative projects come forward already, Mr. Speaker, and I'm looking forward, as a result of this initiative, to seeing even more.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Avonmore, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions, too, are to the Minister of Family and Social Services in regard to the initiatives that were announced yesterday. Four years ago the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence recommended a comprehensive approach to reducing and preventing

family violence, but the government has not yet announced a long-term plan. Yesterday the minister announced funding for the six shelters that we have heard about but did not make any announcement about that strategy which would demonstrate that this government does in fact intend to have a provincewide strategy with the necessary range of services. Given that the satellites which will receive funding are all in northern Alberta, when will the minister address the needs of rural families in central and southern Alberta by providing funding for support groups, satellites where necessary, and access to a toll-free crisis line?

MR. OLDRING: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member was all over the map with her comments. I detected at least three questions, and I'd like to respond to all of them, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I can only say that this government is committed to doing something about this very serious problem. This government is leading the nation as we work together in trying to address this very serious problem. I've already pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that the locations of the satellite agencies were determined on the basis of need and in co-operation, in consultation, with Albertans and, I think most importantly, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters themselves.

As it relates to family violence, Mr. Speaker, it's obviously a multidimensional problem, and it's going to require a lot of Albertans and Canadians working together to resolve it. I can say that I'm very encouraged by my federal counterpart, who is showing some leadership in his consulting with the provinces and assuring us that he is going to outline a comprehensive solution from his perspective later this year. I can only say that from Alberta's perspective we have undertaken a number of initiatives ourselves, and perhaps I can save some of that for the supplementary question.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the rural women of southern Alberta are left on their own.

In view of the minister's statement that emergency transportation to places of safety will be provided, will the minister ask the Solicitor General to work with the police forces in rural Alberta to ensure safe transportation for women and their children in their escape from enraged spouses?

MR. OLDRING: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the Solicitor General will want to supplement my answer. I can only say, as I alluded to in my earlier comments, that it's a multidimensional challenge and that I am working with all my colleagues in government, addressing the problems that are there. I can say that I have had a number of discussions with the Solicitor General, and he certainly shares the concerns, and as I say, he might want to supplement the answer.

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, it's a novel idea to involve the police forces in our province in providing transportation, and I will discuss it within the department.

MS M. LAING: Thank you. It's certainly been a problem for women in rural areas.

Given the minister's stated commitment to prevention and given that treatment for offenders or for children who have witnessed or been targets of violence is primary prevention, what

commitment will this minister give to funding treatment programs as a mandate of all shelters and satellites?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, again I'm not sure that the method of delivering the programs that the member is alluding to is necessarily the only one. I can reiterate that I just announced, yes, two days ago the community-based family violence prevention project fund, and I would see some of those dollars going in that direction.

But, again, I would want to talk about our track record as a province. We are the only province in Canada that has established the office for the prevention of family violence. That was done in 1984, and I'm really encouraged at the initiatives that have resulted as a result of that catalyst. We've seen since then the town of Hinton come up with the idea of Family Violence Prevention Month. As a result of that, it has now become a provincewide initiative. We've seen communities like the county of Strathcona develop a drama production that helped to point out the concern of family violence. It's now being reproduced in other parts of the province, and in fact it's going out on videotape. Again, Mr. Speaker, I can only say that this government is concerned about family violence, and we're doing something about it.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Athabasca-Lac La Biche, then Edmonton-Mill Woods.

AIDS Prevention

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We now know that Alberta has the fourth highest incidence of AIDS in Canada, and therefore the need for sensitive long-term policies towards prevention and treatment is urgent. One area of prevention that's received scant attention from the provincial government is the treatment of intravenous drug users. This is a population that has the explosive potential of causing rapid spreading of the disease not only among drug users but out into the general population. A remedy that's been used successfully in Victoria, Vancouver, Toronto, and other cities is to distribute free needles to addicts. This is based on evidence that shows that the distribution of free needles does not increase drug use and does help to reduce the transmission of infectious disease. My questions, Mr. Speaker, are to the Minister of Health. Will the government now put in place a provincewide program for distribution of clean needles to addicts to help curb the growing risk of AIDS infection in this very vulnerable population?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, certainly at the International Conference on AIDS, which recently concluded in Montreal, the target group for efforts across Canada was identified as intravenous drug users. I have recently heard by letter from the Hon. Perrin Beatty, the federal minister of health and welfare, that the federal government is proposing a program to a total of \$750,000, which they are asking the provinces to participate in in a matching sense, for some intravenous drug users and some of the ways that we could curb the growth of AIDS in our province. I am in the process of reviewing the proposal from the federal minister of health, and I will be responding in the near future, basically indicating that we wish to consult with the groups within our own province who are coming forward, we understand, with some programs. Secondly, if and when a pro-

posals are received, it would be assessed within the overall framework of the AIDS initiatives that we have already launched within our province.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you. So I take it that we are considering the \$750,000 federal program, and hopefully we'll hear more about that soon, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister describe to the House whether the minister foresees a provincewide plan where consistency and cost efficiency can be obtained, as opposed to leaving the distribution up to individual public health centres or pharmacists?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the issue of AIDS and how we deal with it in a comprehensive way is by no means limited to a simple solution of distributing clean needles to intravenous drug users. Certainly that is part of an overall, comprehensive addressing of a very key public health medical issue in our province. I am simply indicating to the hon. member that within the overall framework that we have already developed in this province and which other provinces are looking to for guidance, the issue of providing intravenous drug programs in consultation with our communities that are out there already working on those kinds of programs will be the way that we will approach it in Alberta, as opposed to simply reacting to a not significant fund from the federal government.

MR. SPEAKER: Final.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yes, one does understand that this is only one in many steps that need to be taken.

My final supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the Attorney General. Since the Alberta Pharmaceutical Association has recently decided to allow members to sell needles and syringes to drug addicts and recent reports indicate that this may be in violation of the Criminal Code, can the Attorney General state what discussions, if any, he has had with respect to this matter with his federal counterpart, what effect the Criminal Code would have on a needle exchange program?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on the effect that it might have on a needle program. I can assure the hon. member that we have had conversations with the police department, and although the law specifically includes needles in the paraphernalia provision, we would hope that the police would be able to look at any particular situation and with that discretion not take actions that might in other situations have to arise. If that isn't possible, I'm sure that the federal minister will then be willing to perhaps bring some amendment to the Criminal Code to allow for such a program.

Economic Diversification Plan

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I commend the hon. minister and his department for the role they are playing to ensure that we continue with the economic diversification plan for Alberta, a plan that I know will create thousands of jobs and will continue creating thousands more jobs in the future, a plan that will take thousands of people off welfare, especially in my riding in northern Alberta, a plan that the socialists are against

It seems that their biggest worry today is fancy ties. They're not worried about jobs. My question to the hon. minister is: will he give assurance to this Assembly and my constituents that he will continue with this very effective economic diversification plan for Alberta?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to offer the hon. member the assurance that we're going to continue with that strong economic action plan whereby we have experienced within this province student employment at record levels, whereby our employment levels in general are at record levels. Housing starts are at record levels. Retail trade is at some 6.3 percent year over year. Retail sales: we're the leader in the country.

We're not only happy with the record levels of economic growth we've had within this province; we're going to continue with that strong economic emphasis to the extent that we have recently introduced three additional new programs within the province for the small business sector: two programs specifically dealing with interest rates and also our capital loan guarantee program, in addition to the program that's very much applicable to his area, one whereby those smaller communities will have an opportunity to access funds to develop their own economic development plans.

MR. CARDINAL: Supplemental to the hon. minister, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. CARDINAL: Will he give assurance to the Assembly that the hon. minister will continue co-ordinating this very effective economic action plan with, for example, Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, Environment, Agriculture, Career Development and Employment, and so on?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I'm more than happy to leave the hon. member not only with the assurance that we're going to co-ordinate that activity with the ministers that he's mentioned but to co-ordinate that activity with him on a personal basis, recognizing the concern that he has for the economic development within his own constituency. We look forward in working very closely with the member and all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

MR. CARDINAL: Final supplemental to the hon. Minister of the Environment. Will he give assurance to this Assembly and my constituents that the environmental impact assessment process of Alberta-Pacific will be completed within the time lines as originally laid out?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the environmental assessment review panel has met twice thus far and, according to the latest report from the chairman, Mr. DeSorcy, things are moving along quite well. The deficiency review for the project has been submitted to the panel this week, and it's expected that within four weeks from the end of this week the public hearings will start.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister

responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board. It's now nine months since the release of the much heralded Millard report on the Workers' Compensation Board, which had a number of recommendations, some of which require legislative change. Yet as we get to the last days of this session of the Legislature, we see that this minister, who called himself a friend of the injured, hasn't cared enough to introduce legislation to effect some of those recommended changes. So I want to ask the minister this: how much longer are injured workers going to have to wait until this government addresses some of the substantive recommendations that were made by the Millard report that require changes, in particular, for example, the one that recommended the indexation of earnings and pensions of injured workers, and introduce the necessary legislation?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right in suggesting that there's a number of good recommendations in the Millard report. We have just appointed six members to the Workers' Compensation Board, and they are working very, very closely with management and themselves in going over all the recommendations. I would hope that we would have from that board very quickly recommendations on legislative changes to improve workers' compensation.

MR. GIBEAULT: Well, it's been a long time waiting, Mr. Speaker, but I'd like to ask the minister this: can he give an assurance to the members of the House here now, since we have in section 49 of the Legislative Assembly Act a provision to protect the earnings of Members of the Legislative Assembly, that he will be bringing forward and sponsoring a similar provision, a comparable provision, to the Workers' Compensation Act that will protect the earnings of injured workers? Will he do that?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I guess the member hasn't been listening. I said and I'll say it again that the board of directors for the Workers' Compensation Board is reviewing all recommendations. That's just one of the many recommendations of the Millard report. I would hope they would be bringing that back to myself for consideration.

MR. GIBEAULT: No indication of when. We're still waiting, Mr. Speaker.

Let me ask this minister one last question. Since a lot of the problems related to the WCB stem from the fact that injured workers still don't have a voice on the board, can this minister, who two months ago promised to have an injured worker appointed to the board but still hasn't done so -- when will he appoint an injured worker to the board?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, it's amazing that when you can't make a point, you holler and scream. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. McEACHERN: You didn't answer the question.

MR. SPEAKER: Just wait.

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would answer the question if they would wait for the answer.

I made a commitment some time ago that I would consider an injured worker for the board. That's a consideration that I

intend to keep, and before too long we expect to have that board totally and fully appointed and working.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Westlock-Sturgeon

Support for Farmers

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is to the Minister of Agriculture. At the recent western provincial agriculture ministers' conference in Saskatchewan the ministers issued a communique¹ with a lot of soft, cooing noises about crop insurance, method of payment, and of course ignored the rising Canadian dollar and its detrimental effect on food exports. The minister has made a statement recently in the House that crop insurance would not cost the farmers any more in spite of the fact that the federal government is going to put in less. So if this is the case, I'd like to ask the Minister of Agriculture whether the province is going to increase the contribution or whether they're going to reduce the quality of coverage to the farmer or both.

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I should correct the hon. member and point out that the meeting he was referring to that was held in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, was a meeting of all provincial agriculture ministers along with the federal minister; it was not a meeting of western agriculture ministers.

In response to the more direct question I believe the hon. Associate Minister of Agriculture, who has crop insurance as a responsibility, answered rather fully in the House that providing we get the improvements that we desire to negotiate into the hail and crop insurance program, starting the next crop year the funding ratio will be the province and the federal government splitting 50-50, half the costs of the premium plus the administration. The producer will continue to pay 50 percent of the premium, as they have historically. Whether or not the producer will have to expend more for crop insurance protection will depend entirely upon the type of options the producer selects.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, obviously, then, the fanner is not going to get increased coverage.

The other part of the conference, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the western farm producers have received a \$720 million a year payment for joining Confederation, you might say, for paying for the freight rates. In view of the fact that the U.S. government has used this payment to farmers to countervail farm exports into the United States, what other methods of payment are we thinking of that will get around the curtailment? Because if you pay it to farmers, it's out, and if you pay it to the railroads, it's wrong. How are we going to use that \$720 million without harming our exports to the United States?

MR. ISLEY: First of all, Mr. Speaker, to correct a wrong impression implied in the preamble, if the crop insurance program is not improved to the point where we're satisfied in Alberta that it will respond to our producers, we do not pay the increased provincial share of the premium. That's part of the deal, and that's part of what is being negotiated.

I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon is finally coming around to think like most other Albertans on the pay the railway, pay the producer debate. We had the pleas-

ure not too long ago of jointly attending a meeting of the western barley growers, and I will probably have to credit them with contributing to the hon. member's education. First of all, I should say, as everyone in the Assembly is aware, that it's been the Alberta position for some time that we should be paying that Crow benefit to the producer and leaving it up to the producer then to decide on how to best market their products, whether to feed them at home, whether to take them to a local processing plant, a local feedlot, or whether to demand greater efficiencies in the transportation of that product. There are various methods of paying it to the producer, most of which are currently being explored.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, given that that's the whole issue, that the government of the United States says that no matter what way we pay it, it is wrong, obviously the government is wasting the \$60,000 a year paid to the former member, Mr. Planche, to come out with crap like that

Would the minister go on then, and if he cannot analyze and tell us what we're going to lose in countervail, can he tell us what we're going to lose in exports to the U.S. in the fact that the Canadian dollar has jumped 10 cents in the last two years? Has he made any studies in his department what we are losing on that score?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would take exception to the comments made about the role that Mr. Planche has played in the pay the producer debate. I think the work that Mr. Planche has done has helped us tremendously. I think that the work of the committee chaired by the hon. Member for Taber-Warner during the last session helped us tremendously. I think I've already indicated in the House that we're very close to unveiling a B.C./Alberta wheat pool model on how to pay the producer. It's our feeling that if you put that money into the producer's hands, it will not be countervailable, and that's a debate that we hopefully will win as time goes on.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Red Deer-North.

Taxation Policy

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. In the 1987-88 budget year, corporate taxes contributed an estimated \$560 million to the Treasury, and in the current budget year, the forecast is \$650 million in corporate taxes. That's an increase of about 20 percent. Part of the reason for that is because in 1987 this province increased the corporate tax rate by 36 percent. Can we have an assurance from the Treasurer that his analysis shows that this increase in the corporate tax rate has not had a negative effect on business investment in the province?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, this question from Red Deer-North is in fact on point. It does point to the very important fact that private-sector . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The time for question period has expired. Might we have unanimous consent to complete this series of questions? Those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, what we can point out is that the corporate tax rates in Alberta, in fact as the Member for Red Deer-North has pointed out did increase in 1987 by 35 percent. We think that that amount is judicious, that if you increase the tax amounts any more in this province, particularly for the small businessmen, you would find that investment would not be attractive, that jobs would not be created, and economic activity would not come to our province. That's why, if members look at page 21 of the budget speech, two important pieces of information jump out there. Number one, the rates are shown and were quite comparable with other provinces, but also it shows very specifically that in terms of per capita basis the taxes raised in this province are very high. So you always walk that delicate balance between taxing too much and driving investment elsewhere, and leaving enough for the private sector to pay out in dividends, to pay taxes on, and to reinvest. We think we've got the right balance because in fact as the member points out our tax . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Supplementary, Red-Deer North, briefly. [interjections] Order still.

MR. DAY: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the facts seem to bother the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, to the Treasurer. In light of the fact that the present split of taxation is about 23 percent corporate taxation and 77 percent income tax, can the Treasurer tell us if his figures show that there will be a shift from the corporate side to the personal income tax side, or will it maintain its present balance?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I've tried to point out before -- and that's the green-marble/red-marble analysis for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I hope you understood it. If you take the corporate tax aside, obviously a larger percentage of the pool of taxes collected will come from the personal side as opposed to the corporate side. Now, what we can expect to happen with the strong economic recovery which has taken place in this province . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order in all the benches.

MR. JOHNSTON: The stronger performance by the corporations themselves, Mr. Speaker, will provide more taxable income and more tax paid to this province. But corporations have to recover the tax losses that have already been experienced, and we think by the middle part of this year the corporate collections, certainly in 1990, will start to increase.

On the personal side, Mr. Speaker, as I've tried to point out as well, because we have such a vibrant economy, more people at work than ever before with higher earnings in this province, you have to expect that the personal tax sector will pay more as well. It's an indication of a strong, healthy economy. We think the balance will improve considerably through 1990-91, as we move towards that balanced budget.

MR. SPEAKER: Final, Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Treasurer. Can the minister tell us, in light of the fact that Alberta broadened its corporate income tax base as part of federal tax reform, will we now be lowering our percentage rate in light of the fact that it is one of the highest corporate tax rates in the country?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly take that as a recommendation as we shape the next fiscal plan and the next budget for the year ahead. I obviously can't give any commitments, but we have to be always careful about the rates of tax. We prefer to use the tax system because it's up front, as opposed to using the subsidy system that other provinces do to attract new investment. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. There are other things to be done this afternoon.

Westlock-Sturgeon, in your line of questioning you used a word which is unparliamentary: "crap." Would you like to stand up and withdraw it, please.

MR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have no difficulty. When associated with the Agriculture minister and this government, using that word does insult all the fertilizer manufacturers in the province. So I withdraw it.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Member for Calgary-McCall. [interjections] Order please.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I communicated to the Chair today with regards to a point of privilege I wished to raise, which you indicated that, unfortunately, under the two-hour time limit you wish it dealt with tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: The matter rose yesterday and was not brought to the attention of the Chair at that time. Under our own Standing Orders indeed the notice for today was defective by one hour. Therefore, the matter will be dealt with tomorrow between Calgary-McCall and Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: I am prepared, Mr. Speaker . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair is bound by Standing Orders. It will be done tomorrow.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

head: WRITTEN QUESTIONS

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move the following. . . [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Edmonton-Kingsway, please. Are you on a point of order? Thank you.

Deputy Government House Leader, please.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that the following written questions stand and retain their places on the Order Paper 229 and 231.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

216. Ms M. Laing asked the government the following question:

Of the creditors registered with the maintenance enforcement program in the 1988-89 fiscal year

- (1) what percentage were social assistance recipients,
- (2) what percentage receiving full payment from debtors were social assistance recipients,
- (3) what percentage receiving partial payment were social assistance recipients, and
- (4) what percentage receiving no payment were social assistance recipients?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I can't amend a question, and on that basis I can't provide the information as requested but will provide the information that is available to the member.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

218. Rev. Roberts asked the government the following question:

What is the Department of Health's position with respect to the relative value guide study of the schedule of medical benefits currently under way by the Alberta Medical Association?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I can't accept this question because there isn't a full position developed as yet. Certainly we have been urging the Alberta Medical Association to look at relative value guide evaluations that have been done in other jurisdictions. But to define a position at this point would be premature, so I won't accept the question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question 218 is rejected.

220. Rev. Roberts asked the government the following question:

What is the estimated annual cost to the government of entering into an agreement with the Easter Seal Ability Council for matching grants to supply power mobility aids for clients who require them in order to become independent, self-reliant, and productive members of society?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I will accept this question.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Question 220 is accepted.

227. Mrs. Hewes asked the government the following question:

With respect to Alberta Meals on Wheels and the home care program:

- (1) What is the number and location of home care agencies that are delivered through the public health units?
- (2) What is the number and location of home care agencies that are operating independently from the public health units?
- (3) (a) How many home care agencies have waiting lists?
(b) What is the average length of wait for these home care operations?

- (4) How many home care services provide funding for Meals on Wheels delivery?
- (5) How many communities offering home care have decided not to fund Meals on Wheels?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I will accept Question 227.

MR. SPEAKER: Question 227 is accepted.

230. Mr. Taylor asked the government the following question:
- (1) In the last five years how many quitclaimed or foreclosed properties by the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation were reacquired by the original borrower?
 - (2) How many of the quitclaimed or foreclosed properties were resold by the purchaser to the original borrower within one year of the quitclaim or foreclosure?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, it is with regret that I again have to reject the question from the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon. The fact of the matter is that the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation has no tracking mechanism to trace the ownership of land once it has disposed of it at market value. I would inform the hon. member that a search at the Land Titles Office, though, does reveal the ownership of any land parcel in the province.

head: **MOTIONS FOR RETURNS**

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that the following motions for returns stand and retain their place on the Order Paper: 192, 201, 202, 214, 222, 223, 224, 225, and 228.

[Motion carried]

182. Mr. Hawkesworth moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the documents that form and support the claim by the government of Alberta against the federal government under the stabilization provisions of the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act in respect of the 1986-87 revenue downturn.

[Debate adjourned August 10: Mr. Hawkesworth speaking]

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was finishing my remarks the other day about this motion for a return asking that the Provincial Treasurer table the documents on which the claim has been based to the federal government to support the Provincial Treasurer's contention as part of his Budget Address that something like \$195 million ought to appear in this year's budget estimates as potential income likely to be received from the federal government under the stabilization provisions of the fiscal arrangements Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer has refused to provide that to this Assembly. It's unfortunate. It's about par for the course though. I'm afraid to say that these kinds of documents, in which the sunny and optimistic disposition of the Provincial Treasurer comes forward, are not going to be shared with the Assembly to see whether his sunny optimism is simply rhetoric

or whether it is, in fact, based on reality and the real facts of the case. But that's not going to be provided to us. It appears that we'll simply have to let the wheels of time proceed on their due course, and we'll see whether the federal government is going to provide Alberta with the money that Alberta thinks is due to it. Perhaps four years from now, if the money still hasn't come forward, we can look back at *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, and review the record. I'll be able to say, "Well, I told you so," that the federal government was unconvinced, and that's unfortunate.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's too bad that these documents won't be provided. I continue to keep an open mind when the Provincial Treasurer makes his outrageous statements in the Legislature. It's too bad that the statements aren't backed up by the documentation, but that's the way it is. That's . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Typical.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: . . . typical. I shouldn't be surprised at that, I guess, but we'll see. We'll see in the due course of time whether the Provincial Treasurer can make good on the promises he has made to the people of Alberta that this is, in fact, a justifiable and defensible claim. He certainly hasn't been able to make that case in the Legislature. And, certainly, given the statements that the Prime Minister made some months ago, that if provincial governments don't get behind this sales tax he wants to bring in, watch out -- "They'll face the consequences," he said, without spelling out what those consequences were. Even if these documents that the Alberta government has put forward are actually defensible and make a good claim, it doesn't mean that the federal government is going to accept them, unless perhaps the Provincial Treasurer and the provincial Premier not continue in their opposition to the sales tax. But if we don't have the documents in front of us, Mr. Speaker, to indicate whether this is a valid claim or not, I guess we're just going to have to watch events unfold and determine from those whether this was, in fact, a valid claim, a defensible claim, and one in which the Provincial Treasurer wasn't just pulling Albertans' collective leg.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

191. Mr. Fox moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all agreements entered into by the Provincial Treasurer and lending institutions pursuant to section 10 of the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, the government will reject this motion in that the terms in the agreements with respect to the financial institutions in the province as to the management of the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act are, of course, confidential.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Member for Vegreville, summation.

MR. FOX: If I may close debate, the reason I didn't make any opening comments is because I just assumed it would be a matter of course that the Provincial Treasurer would be forthcoming in his response to this motion for a return. I think it's a reasonable request, Mr. Speaker. The farm credit stability program is one that this government has bragged about for over three years. They talk about it in different ways when they want to convince

rural Albertans that they're really doing something for them. Then they describe it as a \$2 billion program; now a \$2.5 billion program.

But we need to remember that that's money not given to farmers; that's money lent to farmers, Mr. Speaker, at 9 percent interest. There's a fairly complex arrangement made with the banks with respect to the delivery of that program. I think it's fair and just for us as members of the Assembly to want to see the agreements that were made between this Provincial Treasurer and the banks with respect to the farm credit stability program, and through us the farmers for whom this program was designed would have access to that information too. I'm sure the Provincial Treasurer would want to assure me that there's nothing sub rosa about these agreements. That being the case, I can't for the life of me imagine why he would continue to play his "I've got a secret, I've got a secret" game that seems to characterize this government, Mr. Speaker.

The time has come for the government to be up front with the people of Alberta with respect to the arrangements they've made behind closed doors with the people who control the economy: the banks of the country, the Peter Pocklington of the province, the people who seem to have preferred access to public funds through this government. It's got the government into trouble time and time again. I could refer to a litany of failures and unfortunate situations that this government has gotten the people into. In every case it leaves the taxpayer on the hook. That's why I wanted to give the Provincial Treasurer the opportunity to come clean, show the people what -- if he's got nothing that he's ashamed of in these agreements, then he certainly shouldn't be afraid to share them with us. That's what I was asking him for, that's what I expected he would do, and certainly that's what the farmers in the province of Alberta expected him to do. I, quite frankly, am disappointed in the would-be Premier from Lethbridge-East.

[Motion lost]

204. Mr. Chumir moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the information-sharing agreement signed by eight of 10 provinces on or about April 1989 relating to the sharing of information about financial institutions and a copy of the document signed by the four western provinces in October 1988 on the same subject.

Mr. Johnston:

That Motion for a Return 204 be amended as follows:

- a) by deleting the words "by eight of 10 provinces on or about April 1989 relating to the sharing of information about financial institutions and a copy of the document signed",
- b) by deleting the words "on the same subject",
- c) by adding in the words "With regard to financial institutions," at the beginning of the motion, and
- d) by adding in the words "and subject to approval of all other provinces, a copy of the interprovincial agreement on information sharing signed by most provincial ministers in April 1989" after the words "October 1988."

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I have circulated an amend-

ment to Motion 204. I think all members have a copy of it. I've provided advance notice, I hope, to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Essentially, in it I'm suggesting that if the motion is amended as agreed to, we'd be prepared to provide this information as soon as all provinces have either signed it or agreed to the fact that we've tabled it. At the present point my understanding is that two provinces have not signed it, but subject to them signing it and subject to approval of my colleagues, I would be pleased to provide it to the Assembly and will do so with the amended motion as agreed to.

I move the amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The amendment is being distributed. The Chair sees that it is in order and assumes that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo now has a copy.

Speaking to the amendment. Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This amendment reminded me of my days as a tax lawyer, trying to bob and weave and figure out what the minister had in mind. But if I have interpreted it correctly, the minister has indicated that he will provide the agreement which was entered into between the four western provinces in October 1988 but that the agreement of April 1989, which presumably supersedes the earlier 1988 agreement, will not be provided unless all of the provinces of this country -- not just the eight signatories, but all of the provinces -- agree to the provision of that information.

I must say that I find that highly unacceptable. This is an agreement entered into on behalf of the people of this province, and it's tantamount to the federal government saying that it would not provide to the people of this province -- that it intends to keep hidden a treaty which it has entered into with a number of other countries without disclosing the nature of that treaty to the people of this country. I see the Provincial Treasurer kind of has a more quizzical look than normal on his face with respect to the comments that I made, and perhaps we have a difference in the interpretation of the amendment that he's entered into. I would be interested in hearing from him, but I interpreted it on the basis that I have mentioned. And as I say, this should not be treated as a element or an item of confidential information which is provided by one government to another government. It is, in fact, an agreement. It is an agreement that we have agreed to bind ourselves to and that we're operating under. It is an agreement that we are currently operating under, and it is one in which the government is taking steps and providing information and receiving information on behalf of and as the representative of the people of this province, not on its own behalf.

I think that it's very, very wrong for the government to think that it can and should keep an agreement between our provinces secret from the people of this province. Now, if they say this is something that other provinces have said, "Well, we're only going to sign an agreement on the basis that you agree to hide it," well, I think the response is: "Thank you, but we're not interested in that style of government. If you want to hide agreements from your people, fine, but if we enter into an agreement on behalf of our people, that's a public agreement." That, of course, is not the style and modus operandi of this government. We see time after time after time that they hide information from the people of this province. I think the Treasurer is working under the wrong political system in respect of his attitude towards freedom of information, based on his modus operandi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: On the amendment There's a narrow focus.

MR. McEACHERN: Mr. Speaker, I think the amendment should not be necessary. It is just a way, on the Treasurer's part, of trying to weasel out from his responsibility to let the people of Alberta know what kind of agreements he's making with other provinces.

One of the things that's concerned me right from the start since the Principal collapse some two years ago -- well, there were a number of other problems prior to that with financial institutions in this country -- was that this government seemed to take the attitude that they were far more concerned about looking after Alberta's jurisdiction and making sure that other provinces or the federal government didn't make any incursion into Alberta's jurisdiction. I think they would be much more on the right track if they would consider how they might protect the consumers of financial products in this country, and it seems to me that this is another example of them wishing to operate in secret. They should know that the kind of trouble they got into in Principal was because they did not share, in some cases anyway, information with other provinces like Ontario and B.C. and Saskatchewan, and we now find ourselves in this pretty mess that we are in.

Here we're not even asking for the information that they're sharing; we're asking them for the agreement that says what kind of information they will share. So the motion is really saying that if you make an agreement with other provinces to help to regulate the financial institutions of this country, then that should be a public document. We should know what that agreement is and what kind of information is being shared. If the Treasurer does not release that information, then he's making a mockery of his claim, as he did yesterday, that this government was doing something about sorting out the financial problems of this country and the regulatory framework, as he talked about in the Credit Union Act. He promised some changes in the Trust Companies Act. All of that is just so much window dressing and nonsense if his basic attitude is still that he should operate in secret and that he should be able to make agreements with other provinces as to what the regulatory scene is going to be, what the terms are going to be, between the provinces.

How is a company to know what information is being shared and what they have to meet and what is going to be shared across the country if the Treasurer doesn't make that information public? How is the consumer to know that the government is making any serious attempt to regulate the financial industries not only of this province but to co-operate with other provinces so that we in fact have more uniformity across the country? So I'm absolutely aghast that the Treasurer would try to water down the very straightforward question as asked, and he should be making that agreement public.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, I just am at a loss here, in a way, to know what the Provincial Treasurer is hoping to accomplish by bringing in this amendment. In essence, he's giving over the right to release this information to all other provincial governments. I would presume that any one other province could write and say, "Well, we're going to veto the release of this information." Then in that case this information would not be provided. Well, I don't understand how it could be that all provincial governments getting together behind closed doors can make agreements which then don't have to be made public. I've heard this Provincial Treasurer, for example,

in recent days deny motions for returns because it has something to do with confidential commercial information. But in this request that's in front of us here in this motion for a return, the commercial information, contrary to being confidential, ought to be made public so that we have some idea of what it is that provinces have agreed to share by way of information.

Now, public confidence, Mr. Speaker, in the ability of provincial governments to properly regulate financial institutions in the public interest is eroding, and it's eroding considerably, largely due to the kinds of fiascos we've experienced in this province, here in Alberta. It's even gotten so bad that we now have the federal government publicly speaking about the need to step in to do on behalf of the public what the provincial governments appear not to be doing. So if the provincial governments are not going to get their house in order, it's going to leave the federal government no choice but to step in.

Now, the fact that provincial governments might enter into secret agreements behind the scenes and share information about provincially-regulated financial institutions doesn't reassure the public. If you are doing a good job, if you are taking steps to put your house in order, the first thing you should be doing in order to restore public confidence is to be telling the public what it is you're doing, to be telling the financial institutions what you're doing, to be telling the marketplace and others what it is you're doing, to be telling the federal government what it is that you're doing. The more that these agreements revolve around secrecy and cozy relationships between governments and the more that they seem to be reluctant to share that information publicly, the more the public confidence in the provincial governments is going to be undermined and the more it's going to open up an opportunity for the federal government to exploit that lack of public confidence and move in in a political way and impose their jurisdiction to clean up the house that's not been put in order by the provincial government.

So why this Provincial Treasurer or any Provincial Treasurer or any provincial government would keep that information from being made public is beyond me. Why this would even be subject to a motion for a return is beyond me. This is something that should have been shared in an open way long before this time, and it shouldn't be subject to the veto of any one particular provincial government.

[Motion as amended carried]

205. Mr. Chumir moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of a study done by University of Alberta economist John Liverlau on the effect that the proposed federal goods and services tax will have on the Alberta oil industry and copies of any other studies that the provincial government has with respect to the impact of the tax on Alberta.

MR. FOX: Well done.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it seconded by Vegreville?
Provincial Treasurer.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has even been phoning my friend, Mr. Liverlau, to get a copy of this report. It must be very important to him. Too bad its large economic words and big economic concepts would probably go right over his head.

However, notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, all members know that studies done internally for government, which may or not shape policy, are not tabled, not made public, because they are useful only at the point of time. They may have some relevance later on, but in terms of shaping policy you cannot provide the information base which you use. Therefore, this motion would have to be out of line and therefore will be rejected by the government.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo, summation.

MR. CHUMIR: What a surprise, Mr. Speaker; what a surprise. Well, let us note that we are not asking just for Mr. Liverlaw's study; we are also looking for any other studies with respect to the impact of the goods and sales tax on Alberta. So by his answer the minister is in fact saying that this government will not provide one single study of any kind: not one page, not one piece of information, not one iota from such studies to the Legislature and the people of this province. Well, small wonder that it is said around the Café Select and otherwise that this minister is the most secretive minister of the most secretive government in Canada. I'm sure it will remind all members of this House of the way in which the government was forthcoming with information with respect to the free trade agreement. Of course, we all recall that their policy with respect to information on that was no information; again what a surprise.

The reality is that the government spent and continues to spend a small fortune of public money on studies. They are clearly done on matters that are public issues of public interest, and despite that, they are treated by this government as if they were the private business affairs of the Progressive Conservative Party rather than the people of this province. The surprising thing is how the government makes such ignorant decisions with respect to the many issues facing it when it has all these studies before it. It seems to me that it's the Provincial Treasurer who must be having difficulty understanding all these big economic words and concepts of the Liverlaw and otherwise.

Let it be clear that other provinces and the federal government in this country are much more forthcoming than this government and the Provincial Treasurer. Indeed, if we look at *Beauchesne*, we find that it directs much more information to be provided than is the case with this government. I refer to section 446(1) of *Beauchesne*, which provides for certain exceptions which are clearly not applicable in this instance. Then I move on to 446(3), which deals with different reports and studies which are provided for government. In subsection (4)(d) it makes it clear that regardless of whether or not you're dealing with a report which has policy implications, recommendations, and so on, there is an onus on the government in the interests of openness and full information and the democratic process to segregate from those studies, at the very least, the factual basis, the information basis. I recommend that the Treasurer, who is shaking his head there in ignorance on this matter, read page 131 of *Beauchesne* very, very carefully, and he will learn something.

I don't understand, in fact, why it is that the government insists on keeping these reports secret. They probably think that it's going to help them in some political sense, but I must say that, ultimately, in the long haul the harm caused to them from the contempt which they incur from the public of Alberta is far greater than any harm which they would incur from releasing information contained in any piece or pieces of legislation. So

the refusal to release this information, Mr. Speaker, sets a tone of arrogance which takes time to filter through to Albertans but has finally been getting through in recent times, as we have seen with respect to the plummeting popularity of this government. I think it's time that the government learned this lesson and, like the proverbial leopard, changed its spots.

[Motion lost]

217. Mr. Fox moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the master agreement, including any subsequent amendments thereto, between the government of Alberta and Peter Pocklington covering a \$55 million loan guarantee and a \$12 million loan made available to Gainers Properties Inc. on March 3, 1988.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without wanting to prejudice the hon. Provincial Treasurer's reaction to Motion 217, just by way of explanation I'll give members a brief reasoning for my placing this on the Order Paper.

The matter of this government's association with Peter Pocklington, the close friendship that they've had, is well known to the people of Alberta but has come to light in particular with respect to fiscal arrangements -- a fiscal sleight of hand, if you will -- made between this government and Mr. Pocklington last March 3, 1988, when they agreed to backstop \$55 million worth of Mr. Pocklington's loans by way of loan guarantee and provide, as well, a \$12 million loan at 9.6 percent to Mr. Pocklington. The money -- this aid, this bailout package -- at the time was ostensibly provided to Peter Pocklington to build a new hog slaughter facility in southern Alberta at an as yet to be named location and to expand and upgrade the existing Gainers plant in Edmonton, especially the beef portion of that plant. That was the press release that was issued at the time.

We in the Official Opposition expressed concern at the time that in exchange for this largess the people of Alberta would likely receive nothing in return, because we expected that true to form the government would not have required anything of Mr. Pocklington in the way of performance guarantees; gotten firm commitments from him that, yes indeed, jobs would be maintained in the Edmonton plant for a period of time well into the future and that hog slaughter capacity, beef slaughter capacity, would be maintained in Edmonton in the northern part of the province, and that, yes indeed, a new plant would be built in the southern part of the province. All we asked for at the time was evidence, some proof to suggest that this agreement that the former Minister of Economic Development and Trade referred to as a very rigid agreement -- some proof that the people of Alberta indeed had something in return for the \$67 million of their money that was being put at risk.

That's all we asked for. It's not something that we dealt with at length. We patiently awaited the naming of the location of this purported hog slaughter facility. It was supposed to be in a couple of weeks; it took a couple of months, but eventually Picture Butte was named as the location. Again we didn't hassle the government much on it because we wanted to give them a chance to perform. It wasn't until June of 1989, in this session, Mr. Speaker, that it came to the attention of all Albertans that even though the government had given Mr. Pocklington \$6 million of the \$12 million loan and that the loan guarantee had in

fact been exercised, there had been no construction whatsoever at the Picture Butte site; in fact, a piece of land had not even been purchased for the Picture Butte site. And the events unfolded from there.

It got more and more ludicrous each day, Mr. Speaker, as Albertans learned that in the assessment of the Minister of Agriculture we already had sufficient hog slaughter capacity in the province and didn't in fact need a new plant in southern Alberta, even though he was sitting at the cabinet table when the bailout package was approved March 3. We had him taking one foot out of his mouth and putting the other in, referring to the Gainers plant in Edmonton as being outdated, outmoded, likely in need of complete replacement within two to five years. And it just has people wondering why on earth would the government agree to give their good buddy Peter Pocklington \$67 million of taxpayers' assistance to build a plant that they in their assessment think doesn't need to be built in southern Alberta and to upgrade one that they figure isn't worth upgrading in northern Alberta. It's a ludicrous situation.

Our concern right along, as members of the Official Opposition, has been to make sure that taxpayers' money is well spent and protected so that we're not left holding a \$67 million bag when Mr. Pocklington flies the coop. He's been known to do that on occasion. I wouldn't want to refer to his record in business, but there aren't very many communities in this province where you can't find people who still have IOUs with respect to certain companies that have done business in this province. So the \$67 million is something we're concerned about. We don't treat that amount of money lightly; we're disappointed that the government seems to. We want to know that there will be some ongoing stability and growth in this very important sector in the Alberta economy, and we're not convinced that the arrangements, if any, that this government made with their good buddy Peter Pocklington in respect to that \$67 million will guarantee any of that, either the security of the money or the performance on the other end.

Which brings me to the statements that the tough-talking Provincial Treasurer has made in here on more than one occasion, referring to some mystical master agreement in respect to the \$67 million bailout package. He has referred to subsequent amendments to the agreement. He's often brought this to our attention, trying to give everyone assurance that in his hands the interests of the people of Alberta are secure and safe and that, you know, the assets are secure, the loan is secure, and we need not worry about this government, given their stellar record in business management, Mr. Speaker. I guess there are some things that you can count on in life. They've often referred to death and taxes as being a couple of them. I think there are a couple more in Alberta. One is that the Conservative government will make sweetheart deals with their big-shot friends, and the other is that they'll never tell anything about those agreements to the people of Alberta. It doesn't matter what sort of negotiations we're talking about, whether it's forestry companies or the captain of free enterprise, Peter Pocklington, and the access he's had to the public trough.

You know, I could talk for half an hour on the number of agreements they've made with their big-shot friends that they won't tell the people of Alberta anything about. And I'm just trying to give the Provincial Treasurer and this government a chance to lay before the people of Alberta some evidence to suggest that they acted in a responsible way with respect to issuing that aid to Peter Pocklington and that the people of Alberta

aren't going to be left with a vacant shell of a plant, abandoned by Mr. Pocklington, who may well have used some of the money this government has lent him to invest in other enterprises, perhaps even a feasibility study to look at the possibility of moving out of province.

I quite frankly don't believe the Treasurer when he says that the agreements are firm and that he can't use any of the money to expand out of the province, because he doesn't know what's happened with that money. He's referred to it as a general purpose operating loan. It may, for all we know, have been invested in Alberta capital bonds by Mr. Pocklington, which would create the ludicrous situation of the minister of economic development lending Peter Puck the money at 9.6 percent and him turning around and lending it to the Provincial Treasurer at 11.75 percent with Alberta capital bonds. Not a bad deal if you can get it, Mr. Speaker. But it's certainly a possibility that exists, and the only way the government can prove that something as nefarious as that has not occurred is to lay it on the table, show us these agreements, and come clean with the people of Alberta.

It doesn't hurt, Mr. Treasurer, to admit you've made a mistake, that the government in the past was maybe, you know, a little lax, maybe under pressure -- who knows? -- and made an agreement that they don't think is a very good one. Let's start fresh, see the master agreement and amendments thereto, and we can deal with the problems that come forward in a more open way.

MR. SPEAKER: The Provincial Treasurer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard it all today.

MR. FOX: No you haven't.

MR. JOHNSTON: That's what I'm fearful of, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TAYLOR: There's another load over here.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, the opposition has had an opportunity through question period to ask a series of questions about this agreement. At all points we have provided whatever information was sought. We answered questions openly; we provided information as required . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. JOHNSTON: The member -- you have already indicated that in many cases some of the answers may have put the government ministers in somewhat of a conflict, Mr. Speaker. So I can't say that anyone can say that we haven't responded to the questions in an open, forward manner. But what you find here is a fishing trip by the members opposite. They know they've run into a block because they can't understand the way in which the business finance world operates, to begin with, and therefore they're at a very large loss as to how to explain away normal business transactions.

Now, they use words that obfuscate what in fact was done here. They say it was a \$67 million deal. Mr. Speaker, there was no money of \$67 million transferred. There was the loan guarantee put in place similar to other meat packing industries, and we provided a \$6 million grant, which has been debated in the minister of economic development's budget. It's all been on the table. It's been discussed. This is old news. But it's not old news to the people who work for the Gainers plant, and that's where the real tragedy is coming. The people across the way, the socialist people over here who know nothing about responsibility, who can say whatever they want off the top of their heads -- without any denial they can say anything they want off the top . . . Look at the member for Edmonton-whatever it is over here, who called my colleague such a dastardly name. Performance of that order is not tolerated, Mr. Speaker. It's not . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, on this matter. That's a matter being dealt with tomorrow in view of privilege request. So that's not germane to this discussion.

The Chair also points out to all hon. members Standing Order 13(4). Let's not interrupt members except to raise a point of order. Let's get through this, please.

MR. JOHNSTON: You're right, Mr. Speaker. But from time to time I get carried away with these kinds of insults to the Legislative Assembly. [some applause] I just hope that the socialists are as spontaneous tomorrow in their withdrawal, Mr. Speaker.

So what we have here is a terrible attempt to frighten the poor workers at the Gainers plant by pursuing this issue, by showing that there's something wrong with the deal. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of irresponsibility we see from those people across the way. Here's a government attempting at every avenue possible to generate jobs, to secure a sound, meaningful future for the work force of this province, doing all they can on that side, on education and health as well, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjection] . . . to have it all mocked aside by the . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Order please, Provincial Treasurer. Perhaps some members had a little difficulty in hearing about the reference to Standing Orders. It's going to be kept up all afternoon. So keep interrupting, and perhaps we'll have someone doing some other kind of course of action.

The Provincial Treasurer, speaking to this particular issue. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments, sir.

Let me say that we have, wherever possible, answered a series of questions. The opposition brought my colleague the minister of economic development back on two occasions to pursue this issue. They forgot about it, and missed it the first time; their research wasn't very good. But the second time it came back my colleague the minister of economic development stood here time after time, explained what happened, fully provided the information. My colleague the minister of economic development has done the same thing. Wherever possible I have provided the same information, Mr. Speaker. And now they suggest that there's some other agenda here. Well, that just is tragic. And therefore members will know that deals of this order, agreements of this order, understandings between government and the private sector where there is a nature of confidentiality, along with a variety of other loan guarantees which we

put in place to ensure jobs happen in this province, cannot be tabled in the House. All members understand that very important principle. It's been agreed to before here, Mr. Speaker, and it is that principle that we stand on when we reject this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really think that the government can't have it both ways on these so-called secret deals. For the minister to stand up from time to time and say, "Well, I'm going to answer part of your question this way by revealing this little tiny aspect of the agreement," or on another occasion he wants to reveal another part -- the reality is that these things are only secret so long as it appears to serve the political interests of the government that they remain secret. He goes around talking about, "Well, we're secured because we have a floating charge on assets." Now, a floating charge on assets may be worth next to nothing in the context of this particular company.

I think it's an absolute and utter mistake for a government to believe that it can put public money behind agreements which are by their nature secret. It's a fundamental and tragic error, and it's one that's going to cost this government and, I suggest, this minister dearly in time to come. You can't go around handing out taxpayers' money or guarantees, promises of paying taxpayers' money on certain conditions, without letting those taxpayers know what you've agreed to. It's not as if we're asking about the personal business dealings of Dick Johnston. What we're asking about is the dealings of the Provincial Treasurer on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. That's what we're asking about. And if these matters do affect the minister's personal finances, nobody on this side is interested in this, unless of course it involves a public agency such as the government of Alberta or possibly the Treasury Branches or some other mode along those lines.

What we're talking about here is an agreement which is by its nature secret at this point in time, by which there has been at least \$6 million granted so far. For what purpose and on what security and with what assurance is unknown, except insofar as the minister makes up answers in question period. He says: "Okay. Well, today I'm going to tell you this little bit about the agreement," which little bit may be in context; it may be out of context -- whatever. You can't have it both ways. You can't say on one occasion, when it's time to look at the whole agreement and see what the terms are and the extent to which the terms have been followed to date, that "No, no; this is a secret agreement," but on another occasion when you get a question which may be politically embarrassing, that "Oh well, we're prepared to reveal this particular aspect of the agreement," whether that relates to the security, whether it relates to the performance of the company or not.

It gets us back in the same box we've always been in with this particular transaction in that at least \$6 million in money that was collected from the taxpayers and sent to the general fund which the Treasurer controls on behalf of the taxpayers was granted to one Peter Pocklington or his companies, or some number of companies. Maybe it was even a numbered company. Who knows? But that was done as part of the agreement that's sought here. In addition, the government on behalf of the taxpayers -- not in their own right as individuals but on behalf of the taxpayers -- agreed to be responsible for \$65 million of Peter Pocklington's debts. Whether that was through whichever

of his companies or a numbered company makes no matter in terms of this particular debate, although I think it does make some difference when it comes time to evaluate what type of stewardship this government is undertaking on behalf of the people who work so hard to send the taxes to support this government. It's the taxpayers' money, and sooner or later somebody over there has to realize that's what it's all about in this debate.

It's not a question of voyeurism. It's not even a question of doubting the word of the Provincial Treasurer. It's a question of having the ability to evaluate how your tax money is being spent. And how in the world can you evaluate fairly how tax money is being spent -- I hesitate to use the term "investment," because with so many of these Tory investments turning out to be expenditures in the long run, how can you evaluate these expenditures if the government isn't even prepared to reveal the basis upon which the expenditures are made?

I think it's a fundamental category mistake for them to suggest that somehow they should be allowed, in their temporary resting places as ministers of the Crown, to go ahead and sign guarantees of future repayment by future taxpayers -- who, you know, may not even be in the workplace now -- when it comes time to reckon some of these Bills; that they can do that on behalf of those people and not even have to reveal what it is they've agreed to. I find it unbelievable, and I have a theory that people living in Edmonton-Jasper Place, at least, would agree with that point of view. So you just can't stand up here from time to time and reveal bits and pieces of the agreement or recall them off the top of your head or whatever and say, "Well, that's what it is, and it's been fully explained," and not be prepared to pass the goods forward when the time comes.

And the time has come today. My colleague the Member for Vegreville has put forward the motion for a return in the appropriate forum, seeking copies of agreements whereby public funds have been granted and other potential government revenues have been staked on behalf of a particular businessperson who has, let's face it, rather notorious political ties with this government. Was not Peter Pocklington at the leadership convention where the current Premier was chosen to lead the Progressive Conservative Party? Was he not there endorsing the Premier? I mean, what are the checks and balances in this system? Is a cheque written to a certain campaign fund and balanced by this type of fiscal arrangement with the government whereby the government is not even prepared to reveal what type of arrangement is made? Is that the kind of game we're in here? I think the question cannot be answered if the government is not prepared to come forward with the agreements that it's entered into with this one individual, who's done -- aside from this particular business -- quite a lot of damage to the business reputation of people who operate in this city because this is one businessperson who gets more publicity out of this town than any other. His relationships with this government are rather notorious.

I think you want to talk about investor confidence. What does it do to the rest of the people who are in companies who are involved in this industry? I had somebody from Fletcher's telling me that they had to seek a loan guarantee from the province because how can they compete with one Peter Pocklington who receives loan guarantees and direct loans, all kinds of cut-rate deals, deals cut in secret so that they can't be revealed, the details can't be known by the people who have to backstop and finance those deals. I think it's rather a shameful performance.

What it does is harm the reputation of the entire business climate in this province.

The Treasurer has the gall to stand up and accuse the opposition of being reckless with the future of Gainers. I think one should look at the track record of one Peter Pocklington and analyze whether this person really has any interest in developing the meat packing industry in this province. The background of this individual is as one who flips real estate, buys and sells real estate properties. There's some likelihood that the Gainers transaction resulted from one of those things in any case. Now the individual is talking, at least privately, about closing down operations in this city and moving to the province of Quebec, where presumably he feels there are some other political deals to be cut, some more cash to be had, and off to the races. He would then, you know, be their problem, which I guess is a small blessing in some respect.

I was sort of intrigued last summer that at the very time many of these transactions were being consummated -- if I can use that term -- Peter Pocklington was purchasing a mansion on the lakefront in Kelowna for some \$800,000 or \$900,000; just about the same time the Provincial Treasurer was making sure that he could obtain \$6 million in a direct loan guarantee to construct a plant which hasn't been built yet, on which site apparently the cleanup was conducted by the Minister of the Environment courtesy of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund; just another sidelight to this particular operation.

So I think the only interpretation that's possible on the Provincial Treasurer's comments is that he believes somehow that Peter Pocklington has no intention of modernizing the plant in Edmonton. His comments about the tragedy of jobs in the city of Edmonton have to be interpreted as some means of covering his posterior in the event that such a thing happens, which would indeed be unfortunate. But if it does happen, I suggest it's because of the ethic of a government that believes it can make secret deals with private businesspeople who happen to be notorious political supporters of the Premier, a government that believes, has the ethic, that it can get away with that sort of behaviour which results not only in the possible harmful prospects or harm to the future of the people employed at Gainers but, I suggest, to the many hundreds and thousands of legitimate businesspeople in this province who don't pursue secret back-room deals with their friends in the government, who don't live off this kind of government largess, and who don't expect their political allies in government to stand up and say, "No, we can't tell you the truth about what type of an agreement we've signed with this company."

It's a very bleak performance on the part of the Treasurer and, I suggest, by the government as well. I hope that this government doesn't attempt to cover up on this matter any further than it has to date.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Belmont, followed by Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak briefly to Motion for a Return 217. I have a number of Gainers workers residing in my constituency, and I believe that they as taxpayers have a right to know what kind of agreement this government has entered into with Mr. Pocklington. Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Pocklington was the one that locked these workers out after he had lowered their wages back in the early '80s. Then in the middle '80s -- 1986 --

not only did he lock the workers out but he brought in scabs or replacement workers to . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you. That word "scab" has been ruled unparliamentary in this Legislature. Please withdraw and use another.

MR. McEACHERN: What? The word "scab" is unparliamentary?

MR. SPEAKER: It has been declared unparliamentary in this Legislature.

MR. McEACHERN: Since when and by whom?

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway, you're completely out of order.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, that is a ridiculous statement. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: You are out of order.
Edmonton-Belmont, please.

MR. SIGURDSON: Mr. Speaker, you know, I did say replacement workers as well, but the fact of the matter is that in many circles "scabs" is not an inappropriate word in terms of the . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Order please. Order.
Edmonton-Belmont, continue without that word. Thank you.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, may I ask, Mr. Speaker, when the word was . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. It was declared in a previous Legislature. We'll check the debate for you.
Carry on.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, regardless of that, Mr. Speaker, there were the legitimate workers at the plant and then, I suppose, there were illegitimate workers at the plant, and we all know what illegitimate people are.

AN HON. MEMBER: Strikebreakers.

MR. SIGURDSON: Strikebreakers . . .

MR. McEACHERN: Scabs.

MR. SIGURDSON: . . . and others.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Kingsway. You've been warned twice. If it happens a third time, I'm afraid you'll be seeing the door.
Edmonton-Belmont, please.

MR. McEACHERN: I'm sorry. What was the threat, please? Mr. Speaker, could I have the threat exactly, please?

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway, the Chair has brought it to your attention twice. There will not be a third time.
Edmonton-Belmont, please continue.

MR. SIGURDSON: Mr. Speaker, the point that one tries to make is that the workers that have served Edmonton and Alberta long and hard by being productive members of society and contributing their tax dollars to the coffers of the city, the province, and the federal government, have an investment here. They've got an investment in terms of time they've spent on the kill floor or at the manufacturing plant at 66th Street and the Yellowhead Trail. And they've paid good dollars to this government's coffers. This government has turned around and loaned money to their employer, who has, in fact, at times not been at all fair with the workers, the thousand workers that are employed there.

Now, the Treasurer says we should be concerned about jobs. Indeed we are. Indeed we are, and we are concerned about the quality of work that these people have to deal with as well. Mr. Speaker, a number of these workers have come into my constituency office and have asked just what kinds of guarantees this government has with their employer. The truth of the matter is that I can't tell them that it's a good deal or a bad deal or a sweetheart deal because we can't get the facts. We can't get the terms of the agreement. I think that's most unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because these workers are taxpayers. They want to know. They've got every right to know, and that's the point that has to be made.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just three short points on this particular thing, because my colleagues have said most of it.

The Treasurer says that through question period most of the details have already been released in reference to the particular motion for a return that we are debating. Now, if that's the case, then he's got nothing to lose by releasing the document that would confirm those bits of information that have been released piecemeal under questioning. If there is anything new or different there, of more significance than has been released so far, then we should have that. If there isn't anything more significant, then he has nothing to lose by releasing it. So he can't have it both ways, as my colleague from Edmonton-Jasper Place said. Either he's covering up some of the information that we should have and that should be available, or else he's not, and if he's not, then to not release it is just to be petty and silly.

Another point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, is that the Treasurer, as he likes to do, gets waxing eloquent about who does this or that and projects some of his views onto what he believes we believe, and starts spouting that. I would just like the Treasurer to know that we can speak for ourselves. We are quite capable of articulating our own ideas and own views on the world, and he doesn't need to stand up and tell us what we think or what he thinks we think. You will find, Mr. Speaker, that an awful lot of the time when we heckle the Treasurer, it is because he is doing that. My suggestion is that he be cut off and be brought back to the topic, because the topic, generally speaking, is not what we believe but whether the government is releasing a document, for instance, today.

MR. SPEAKER: Is this a point of order, hon. member? Is this a complaint, or . . . It's certainly not germane to this discussion, the last part.

MR. McEACHERN: There is, Mr. Speaker, one other point that

the Treasurer made that needs to be refuted. He tried, of course, to claim that he's concerned about the jobs for the workers at Gainers. The workers at Gainers know who their friends are in this Assembly. They don't need the Treasurer to tell them that he's the friend of the workers in this province. All you need to do is look at the labour legislation, Bills 21 and 22, that that government pushed through this Assembly last year. The workers of this province know who their friends are.

MR. FOX: I could go on for at least a half hour, Mr. Speaker, commenting on this government's record in management, their tight-lipped policy of secrecy with respect to deals they've made, the fact that Albertans learn every day they can't trust the government. But the point has been made, I hope often enough that it's going to start to sink in on the opposite side, because I know there are a number of hon. men and women on the government benches who are as concerned as us about the kind of shoddy sweetheart deals certain people in their government make with their big-shot friends. I'm hoping that perhaps we'll see things done a little bit differently in the future, if not by them then certainly by us when we become the government next time.

[Motion lost]

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that Motion for a Return 221 stand and retain its place on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

head: MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

211. Moved by Mr. Taylor
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an agricultural resources conservation board, along the lines of the Energy Resources Conservation Board, to be charged with responsibility for the conservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the province's agricultural land base.

MR. TAYLOR: [some applause] Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I always wanted to know what left-handed clapping sounded like.

In rising to propose this motion today -- while I'm stumbling around looking for my notes -- I'm certain of the importance of the motion, because one of the things we have to solve in our society is, I think as Kipling said, to preserve the things that are more excellent. Mr. Speaker, being a poet of some renown from Medicine Hat, I'm sure you learned that in some of your early stages in school. One of the things that is more excellent is the farmland and the quality of farmland in our society. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. TAYLOR: I hear some bleating over there, Mr. Speaker. Poetry sometimes affects people that way. It stirs some to love, others to hatred, and others just to mewl back in the corner of their corral expecting to be fed. I've run into all three.

With respect to our agricultural farmland, one of the statistics to remember is that 30 percent of Alberta's area is arable or under farmland, roughly 50 million acres out of the 150 million

acres that go to make up Alberta, which is good. The world average, as you may or may not know, is that only about 10 percent can raise crops. So on an average, we have three times as much land to raise crops as any other area in Canada. That's led to what I call a sort of buffalo hunter attitude to good farmland, Mr. Speaker. The concept is, "Well, we've got so much of it, what's an acre here, a few acres there? It doesn't amount to much. We've got enough of it to go around. With all those buffalo out there, what are we worrying about? There'll be enough here next year. There'll be enough for the next generation." That is one of the things I think we have to guard against.

This government and other people, to give them credit, were aware of it at one time. At one time those benches over there -- hard as it is to realize now -- were occupied by progressive people who looked forward and looked down the road. In fact, Mr. Speaker, back in '82 they commissioned a report by the Alberta Environment Council, which came out in '86 with a report suggesting or recommending what we do with our land base in the province. The very first recommendation they made is the very one that's in this motion today, that we "establish an agricultural resources conservation board."

Well, Mr. Speaker, the reasons for that are just as valid today as they were at that time. Basically what they found was that although the total acreage under cultivation in Alberta, the 50 million acres, was staying fairly constant and had been fairly constant for nearly 18 to 20 years, what we were getting was that number 1, 2, and 3 farmland was disappearing at an alarming rate and being replaced, to make that total look okay, by number 5 and 6 farmland, which is fairly marginal. Now, I know the Minister of Agriculture will tell you, "Well, it raises a lot more than it did in 20 years ago by modern techniques." But no matter what you do to number 5 and 6 farmland, Mr. Speaker, it is still number 5 and 6; it is still that much poorer than 1, 2, 3, and 4. If I may for the uninitiated, especially some of the ones that were new and in the corner at the beginning of the speech, I emphasize that number 1 is the best land and number 6 is the poorest land. We go from 1 to 6, in case they don't understand that.

Mr. Speaker, some of the surveys they put out in projections for the future were alarming. It was most frightening to look ahead and see some of their recommendations. If we did nothing, what would happen? It may take a minute here just to look into the forecasts of what would happen in the area. If the present trends continue, they said, by the year 2000 -- and that's just around the corner -- a total of about 870,000 acres, about one-sixth of a million acres, would be directly converted to urban use, and half a million would be subdivided into nonagriculture uses. That's everything from golf courses to acreages.

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

By the way, if I may take a moment, Mr. Speaker, I have further investigated where the Premier is going to locate his land down in Stettler, and I must admit . . . As soon as I saw the picture of the land, there were a couple of little humps on the land that were not any larger across than across this Legislature. As an old geologist-farmer, I knew immediately we didn't have 1, 2, 3, or 4 farmland. You don't get those little drumlins or sandhills, as people call them, on good farmland. So the Premier is indeed building his home on poor farmland, and I'd like to pay a little tribute to him in that direction. I don't think he knew at the beginning or I knew at the beginning. But as it

turned out, you might say to a politician who's had a lot of bad luck in the last year or two that he appears to have made the right move in this particular case.

But that's an aside on the speech. The point is that we have farmland disappearing at a great trend. As I mentioned, by the year 2000, half a million acres will be subdivided for non-agricultural uses and a third of a million will be annexed to urban areas, for a total of 870,000 acres. Now this, Mr. Speaker, is lamentable. Remembering, I may add, that number 1, 2, 3, and 4 land that I want to preserve lies very close to the Edmonton-Calgary corridor and around the cities as they developed in the province, primarily because western Canada, like many other areas of the world when they developed -- particularly in the European and Asiatic sectors, where I did a certain amount of work through the years, towns are quite often developed either on trading routes or on seacoasts or good harbours. Over here our towns developed where there was good farmland, because they were at the centre of servicing the first farmland that was taken out. Consequently, when towns grow here, Mr. Speaker, they usually grow out over very good farmland.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have another policy here. It's another board called the Energy Resources Conservation Board. Now, the Energy Resources Conservation Board -- and a better word, I think, probably would be "exploitation board" -- is charged with the responsibility, which it does quite well, to try to get as much of the society's oil and gas, coal, and minerals out of the ground as cheaply as possible and market it at the best possible price. Often this is concerned with placing the oil and gas removal mechanisms on good farmland. They quite rightly from their point of view, up until very recently anyhow, argued that the best way to get the oil was the shortest method. You locate straight above it and zip straight down. The idea that you would set your well on the edge of the quarter section or on the road allowance -- whipstock it, as we call it, or slant it into the reservoir -- oh, that was extra dollars. It would cost more to develop, and the oil and gas royalties wouldn't accrue to the government. The same way with treating the oil and gas. Why pipeline it over to a gas plant that lies in a gravel pit on some poor area a few miles away? Why not do it right there? If it's number 1 farmland, who cares? Consequently, one of the biggest spoilers of our good farmland, believe it or not, has been another resource. It's been the oil and natural gas industry itself, which I think is rather pathetic. You seem to be trading the old analogy that said: why worry about losing all the mink if we're going to replace it with 10,000 rabbits?

Well, it appears the same way here with our farmland. Why worry about losing the farmland? We're going to replace it with sulphur plants and oil plants and well sites. It appears to yield a lot of money. But one of the worst parts about this is that sometimes in the development of these oil and gas plants, we have caused a lot of sulphur or other gases to emit. In other words, the stackless plant has not come to Alberta yet. Although we're taking out nearly all the sulphur, there are a lot of other things in the air besides sulphur. In fact carbon dioxide, for instance, will occupy something like five to 10 times the volume and the weight that sulphur will. That spews out over the land. And we've done little or any studies. We think we know very little about hydrogen sulphide, Mr. Speaker, but we know even less about the trace elements and some of the other gases emitted out of our stacks that billow out over our best farmland.

By the way, while I'm talking about oil and natural gas exploration and extraction, by '85 about 274,000 acres -- that's a

quarter million acres of agricultural land -- had been disturbed by oil and gas exploration. Nearly two-thirds of that has yet to be reclaimed. A very worthwhile chore for the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow to devote his attention to: two-thirds of the quarter of a million acres has not been reclaimed yet. Which leads to another problem I face, Mr. Speaker. If somebody came here from Mars, you'd wonder what kind of society we have when number 1, 2, 3, and 4 farmland are considered to be the backbone . . . Every political party that goes out campaigning -- be it NDP, Liberal, or Conservative -- gets up on the stump and says farming is the backbone of the land and agriculture is what's going to keep us all going. You get pictures dancing through your mind of Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. You know, the herd of cows "winds slowly o'er the lea" and you can hear the bell of the ancient church ringing in the distance; everything's in its place and all is happy with the world. Yet when you come to Alberta and look at the legislation, you ask: "Who's in charge of number 1 farmland? Who protects it?"

Now, suppose you want to convert this precious commodity we all prattle about when we go on an election trail. Could it be the Minister of Agriculture? No, it couldn't be the Minister of Agriculture. They have no authority to interfere with the use of farmland. They can teach how to preserve it, try to keep it from blowing away, try to keep it from being flooded, but if Safeway wants to convert it to a parking lot, oh no, that's not our business. That's an MD's problem or the town's problem. So we say, "Well, if you come here from Mars and the Minister of Agriculture is not in charge of food-producing land, maybe the Minister of the Environment is." Well, the Minister of the Environment will rise to his feet, as he's been known to do a few times in the House, and say: "I'm in charge of reclaiming it. Until it's ruined, it's got nothing to do with me." So we've got the second minister in charge of reclaiming farmland, not trying to preserve it. That's not properly his job. I know he's been busy enough keeping up to what is already there, so you can't blame him for not wanting to preserve farmland. Reclaiming it is a big enough chore.

So we think a little bit more. Well, if a resource needs to be developed around here, we have the Minister of Energy. The Minister of Energy will give a shy, knowledgeable smile, Mr. Speaker, and come back and say: "My job's to get the oil and gas out of the ground, and if it takes a few acres here and a few acres there, why worry about it? We're getting all that oil and gas out of the ground to build hospitals, roads, and all those wonderful things that come out of the ground, so I'm not in charge."

So we look a little further and find that nobody in the provincial government is in charge of preserving farmland. There is no land-use law at all. We say, "Somebody must be." Aha, we do. We find the municipality. They can zone farmland. They can spot rezoned farmland. They can do all kinds of things with farmland. If you talk to the MDs, they say: "Well, don't blame us. Here was a farmer with a farm that was only worth \$100,000 to \$150,000 and we were only getting a few dollars a year taxes, and Du Pont came in and bought it out. Lovely thing. Hauled the loam all away. Now we've got a \$50 million assessment sitting there. We're doing wonderfully. We've got all that money to help build schools and roads." A man from Mars could quite obviously come back and say: "Aha, what an ideal MD, Mr. Speaker. There's one the west have owned by Du Pont and one the east have owned by Goodyear and only one

family in the middle to get all those taxes to be educated."

So what we have is an inborn system that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and this government sit there and approve year after year. You can't blame them. It was started by Liberals and NDPs and other people long before them. What I complain about, Mr. Speaker, is that they don't seem to be aware of the march of progress, that there is something to be preserved here, and they're still using the idea that it should be up to the MD in land-use; it's not important. They wouldn't think of letting the MD of Banff tear down Mount Rundle and sell it to the Japanese for building stone. No, it's a park. It's too important. We won't allow the MD to do that. We wouldn't think of letting the MD deal up the oil and gas and sell it to the highest bidder and to heck with the rest of the province. No, no. It's a resource owned by all the people of Alberta, just like Mount Rundle. But when it comes to number 1 farmland, it's up to the local MD.

Well, maybe we've got one other last turn. Maybe we have a farmer that won't sell his or her land. That seems to me to be very, very ridiculous. We had Du Pont with all this money marching into the scene -- tax laws that call it a once in a lifetime capital gain; everything oriented to sell number 1, 2, 3, and 4 farmland. So what we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, is not only no one in charge of the shop to protect our most precious inanimate resource . . . Our children and our living people, I know, are our most precious resource, but if you get into the elements themselves, the air, earth, and quality of what makes the world go around, no one is in charge of the shop. Instead, we have tax laws, both income tax wise and assessmentwise, to the MD that encourage them to convert the farmland to non-use farmland.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make those points. This is not a political matter. I don't know of a Liberal land-use law. I don't know of a Conservative land-use law or a communist or fascist one, and I've worked in communist and fascist regimes and everything in between. I must admit that those societies that lose sight of maintaining and preserving their farmland and their good food-producing land are losing the sense of what civilization and society's all about.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move adjournment on this motion.

[Motion carried]

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous leave of the Assembly to deal in the balance of time remaining this afternoon with Government Motions and Government Bills and Orders on the Order Paper.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we revert to Government Motions and orders. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

head: GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

14. Moved by Mr. Horsman:

Be it resolved that

- (1) A select special committee of the assembly on electoral boundaries be established consisting of the following members, namely:
Mr. R. Bogle, Chairman,
Mr. S. Day, Vice-Chairman,
Mr. M. Cardinal,
Mrs. P. Black,
Ms P. Barrett,
Mr. T. Sigurdson, and
Mr. F. Bruseker.
- (2) The select special committee consider
 - (a) the appropriateness of the provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act,
 - (b) the implications of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for electoral boundaries and the distribution of constituencies,
 - (c) the composition of the commission and the process by which it is to carry out its responsibilities,
 - (d) any legislation, legal decisions, and historic and current practices of Alberta or other Canadian jurisdictions relating to the distribution of constituencies and their boundaries,
 - (e) any geographic, demographic, and other factors that should be considered in the distribution of constituencies and the determination of their boundaries,
 - (f) the impact of the determination of constituency boundaries on the ability of Members of the Legislative Assembly to fully discharge their duties to their constituents, and
 - (g) any other factors that the committee reasonably considers relevant in the discharge of its duties.
- (3) The select special committee may hold public hearings in Alberta.
- (4) The select special committee is authorized to travel within and outside Alberta.
- (5) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for staff assistance, equipment and supplies, public information needs, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chairman.
- (6) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee, with the approval of the chairman, is authorized, with the concurrence of the head of the department, to use the services of members of the public service employed in that department or of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (7) The select special committee shall report and make recommendations to the Assembly during the first sitting of the Second Session of the 22nd Legislature of the province of Alberta.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I think a few words of explanation are in order. The Bill which was introduced today for first reading is companion to the item now before us. This would provide that a select special committee of the Assembly on elec-

toral boundaries be established to review the appropriateness of the provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. Because in the last few months there have been a number of court challenges to boundaries legislation in additional provinces, and while it is true that the government is anxious to proceed to deal with this matter in an appropriate way, it is clear that we must take some time to consider the implications of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the existing legislation and the method by which the present legislation provides for not only the composition of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act but the parameters within which such a commission, when appointed, would have to carry out its responsibilities.

The resolution provides that the select special committee shall have the usual terms of reference and opportunities to review the matter in depth, to hire appropriate staff, and to carry out reasonable disbursements for travel and public hearings. It also provides that the select special committee shall report and make recommendations to the Assembly during the first sitting of the Second Session of the 22nd Legislature of the province of Alberta.

If I may just briefly refer to the companion legislation, which would delay until the Second Session of this Legislature, and the appointment of a commission, those two things should be read together and understood together. Therefore I appreciate as well, I may say, the consultation and discussions that have been undertaken between myself and the House leaders of the Official Opposition and the Liberal opposition relative to both the nature and the reasons for us proceeding in this manner and, of course, the structure of the committee and its membership.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address a few comments to Motion 14 on the Order Paper. The motion sets up a Legislature committee to review the electoral boundaries Act, resulting in essentially a year's delay in the process of redistribution in our province. I think my concerns are sufficient that I intend to oppose this resolution when it comes to a vote. The difficulty is that these issues that are being dealt with are normally handled in one fashion and now the government obviously intends to deal with it in another fashion.

The Attorney General referred to a number of court challenges in the last few months. I'm not aware of all he might be referring to, but it's certainly more than likely he was referring to the ruling of Madam Justice McLachlin, now of the Supreme Court of Canada, in the action of John Dixon, petitioner, versus the Attorney General of British Columbia wherein the British Columbia electoral boundaries were challenged under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think that must be the matter to which the minister referred, because I'm not aware of any other such decision that's come down recently or, for that matter, any other such challenge at the present time. I think it might be helpful for some of the members to know what was involved in the court case I refer to, particularly the ruling of Madam Justice McLachlin, because it does offer very clear direction on many of the matters that are referred to in this particular resolution, particularly on the question of whether the Charter of Rights and Freedoms affects the distribution of seats in a provincial Legislative Assembly. Quite clearly it does. The ruling, I think, is beyond any sort of misunderstanding as far as that point is concerned.

Madam Justice McLachlin found that the presently existing electoral boundaries in British Columbia violate the provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and, for that reason, are teetering on the edge of unconstitutionality or in fact could be thrown out at any given time. But Madam Justice McLachlin went an awful lot further than that, and I think some of the findings of this significant Supreme Court decision in British Columbia, affecting the law of all Canada, need to be injected in this debate, at least before we go too far with a Legislature committee dealing primarily with legal issues. I would point out to the hon. minister that four of the seven terms of reference in part (2) of this motion deal with legal issues which are resolved in the decision of Madam Justice McLachlin. I think the more significant point is that none of the parties affected by this decision, which was launched initially by the B.C. Civil Liberties Union -- but that includes the government of British Columbia, the Attorney General of British Columbia -- none of the parties is appealing Madam Justice McLachlin's ruling, which makes it quite clearly the law of the land as we sit in this Assembly and debate this particular motion.

So I ask: why do we have a committee of MLAs which is going to look into four specific legal issues which have already been determined by the court? I think it might be helpful to underscore that point just to explain what it was that Justice McLachlin ruled.

Justice McLachlin ruled first of all that the notion of equality is inherent in the Canadian concept of voting rights. That's not to be interpreted as strict equality in the sense of one person, one vote, the way it's been understood in American jurisprudence, but rather a notion which was referred to by the learned judge as relative equality. Relative equality is the law of the land in Canada under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and has been since 1982 when the Charter came into effect. Moreover, relative equality of voting powers is fundamental to the right to vote, which is enshrined within section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Justice McLachlin goes even further than that to define what is meant by relative equality, which of course is the critical question of how much variation is allowed around the principle of one person, one vote. The Americans use the term one man, one vote, but of course we in Canada believe in more inclusive language. It is said by Justice McLachlin that the amount of deviation permitted is a function of the Legislative Assembly acting in accord, and I quote,

with such legal principles as may be found to be inherent in the Charter guarantee of the right to vote, which is found on page 29 of Justice McLachlin's decision. Furthermore, she says,

if there are significant discrepancies in the numbers of people represented by the members of the Legislature, the legitimacy of our system of government may be undermined.

I'm reading from page 30 of the report.

Justice McLachlin, now of the Supreme Court, goes on to say that the distribution of seats which is outside the range of acceptability under the Charter not only violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms but impairs the legitimacy of our system of government, something that I think every member of this Assembly, of whatever political party, ought to be concerned with. It goes on:

The dominant consideration in drawing electoral boundaries must be population . . . It is appropriate to set limits beyond which it cannot be eroded by giving preference to other factors and considerations, such as the 25% limit applied in Canada to

federal electoral districts or the 10% limit recently established in Australia.

So there is a quantitative aspect to this which has been introduced by Justice McLachlin. It seems clear to me that the court decision says the range of acceptability is between 10 and 25 percent of a variation between the various boundaries. Deviations within that range are acceptable insofar as they contribute to better government of the populace as a whole, and those justifying factors must meet an objective test.

Departure from the ideal of absolute equality may not constitute a breach of [section] 3 of the Charter so long as the departure can be objectively justified as contributing to better government.

So you've got numerical criteria and you've got substantive criteria for deciding when a variation is acceptable under the Charter and when it's not, all issues which this government finds necessary to refer to a Legislature committee of MLAs on this motion which have already been spoken to by the court. So I think the minister, who is himself a lawyer and former Attorney General, would find it perhaps passing strange that we would have a committee of lay members of the Legislative Assembly to determine questions which have already been spoken to by the Supreme Court in British Columbia.

This is another aspect of the ruling. The courts have the right to impose a deadline for Legislatures to correct boundary imbalances and to devise such other remedies as may be necessary to enforce section 3 of the Charter. That's the part that's left open in Justice McLachlin's decision. It's up to the court to invent remedies which may be necessary to pull the situation back into line.

So that's the legal background in terms of the British Columbia Supreme Court decision. What is the Alberta situation? We have some problems in our electoral system, not least of which is that returning officers continue to be chosen by the government in power by order in council, which is a system that injects a certain partisan flavour to the process that I think is unbecoming a province of our -- I think the feeling that people have in our province about the impartiality of the system for electing MLAs. . . . Moreover we have very considerable maldistribution on our electoral map. The worst in Canada today is British Columbia, which has already essentially had its boundaries thrown out by the court, and they're in the middle of a process to bring in the Fisher commission report, a new set of boundaries drawn by a judge who essentially carried on a public inquiry.

Aside from that, I think Alberta and Newfoundland are the two that are closest in terms of maldistribution. We have ridings that vary considerably more than 25 percent from the mean. In fact, some are as much as 50 percent below average, some as much as 70 percent above average. So our range is closer to 70 than it is 25; it's certainly not within the 10 to 25 percent zone that was identified by Justice McLachlin. The larger electoral districts are approximately three times the smaller ones in the province of Alberta, and I think this deviation is considerably beyond anything that's permitted under section 3 of the Charter as interpreted by the courts today.

The average urban riding in the 1983 distribution had approximately 32,000 voters compared with the average rural riding of 12,200. So, you know, there are very many different ways that you can look at this thing. In Alberta, with approximately one-third of the population in the nonurban category, our legislation gives that category half the seats, a

third of the population, and the other two-thirds is given the other half of the seats. So if we were in rep by pop, obviously there would be significant changes on the map. If we were to move to the 25 percent rule or even the 10 percent rule, there would be significant changes in some of the seats. It's not necessarily the case that the overall balance would shift dramatically between urban and rural, but if we were operating in the spirit of fairness, there would likely be some variation along those lines. So you have a status quo, as I said, that's 50-50 in representation, two-thirds/one-third in terms of seats.

Now we're in a situation where the courts have spoken. I think it should be incumbent upon the government to come forward with a new formula so we can proceed with the process of redistribution. I want to remind all hon. members that the committee that's being struck by this motion today does not have to report until next year. Then, depending on what they recommend, the actual process for drawing the maps can begin. The way this has operated up to now, and this is all outlined in the existing Act, is that the committee is formed, conducts research, may hold public hearings, does a detailed examination within the framework it's given, and prepares an interim report. The interim report, Mr. Speaker, is then subject to public hearings.

The process of drawing the boundaries is not a one-stage process in itself. Generally it has been a two-stage process to this point in time, for relatively obvious reasons. It's difficult for a lot of people to cope with the issues of redistribution until they see a map or until a proposal is put on the table. A lot of people would come forward and say, "Well, we like our MLA, and we'd like to keep him or her." Some might come forward and say the opposite about that particular member. Nonetheless, most people would feel, if they stand to lose any voting strength in the Assembly, that they would like to keep it.

My argument is that if the courts have spoken on four of the seven, which are really, I think, the guts of what has to be determined by this committee, the government should have the guts to come forward with a position in terms of a formula within the 10 to 25 percent range identified by Justice McLachlin. Any other approach at this point in time, especially given how far we are out of whack compared with the rest of the country. . . . I mean, in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec they're within acceptable limits as far as Justice McLachlin's ruling is concerned. Why we're stalling on this point is beyond me, because all it results in -- I suppose the best-case scenario is that it results in a further year's delay of the redistribution process. Now, that means not only that communities won't know how they'll be represented in this Assembly, but individuals won't know in what riding to seek a nomination. It means that the Chief Electoral Officer would be unable to complete the enumeration in the time frame that's laid out in the legislation that he has to deal with.

I know we're not debating the Bill that was tabled today, but I don't believe there's anything in there about the problem of the Chief Electoral Officer being required to make new voters lists in the second September following an election. But that's a process that begins with riding maps, and then poll maps are made, and then people go out door to door and gather up the names. To some degree this system has been in effect for -- what? -- about 15 years now. People are used to having those voters lists at a particular point in time. It may be incumbent upon this committee to recommend some changes, but again everything gets pushed forward. So we come back with recommendations on changing the Act sometime in the sitting next

year, 1990. Sometime during that year those recommendations are passed into law, which sets up the commission. The commission comes back sometime the following year with an interim report. You then have public hearings on the interim report. It could very well be 1991 before this Assembly is able to act upon new electoral boundaries. I don't believe I'm stretching the point here. It just seems to me that's the logical flow of things. Then the enumeration begins in 1991. We've passed two years into the mandate before any of the work can begin. So it seems to me that what's wanting in terms of bringing our legislation in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is for somebody to make a political decision to go along with the court ruling.

If the government isn't prepared to take that decision, then it faces the possibility of a court challenge in the same way that it happened in British Columbia, which is messy; there's no question about that. Justice McLachlin recognized the awkwardness of simply throwing out electoral boundaries. What do you do in the event that an election is required? I think the courts in Canada would be very reluctant to do what courts in the United States have done, which is to actually go out and draw the map, because there are many complex variables that are involved. I don't argue for a moment that it's not a supremely political exercise to draw those boundaries. You just hope that the thing is balanced in such a way that no one obtains untoward partisan advantage in the process.

There is a lot of hard political work that has to be done in that process but not, I submit, in the first go-around, which is establishing the principle that we're going to follow section 3 of the Charter, we're going to recognize relative equality, and we're going to come forward with the formula that does that. Justice McLachlin has pointed the way. I simply say that the court has spoken; the government should have the guts to quit the stall and to act so this thing can be done in something like the time frame Albertans have come to expect out of the electoral boundary system in Alberta.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important motion. As has been noted by the previous speaker, it is impelled by the British Columbia court case which dealt with the disparity in representation and distribution of seats in British Columbia. The decision in that case, of course, was that the system of representation there offended against the Charter of Rights. In particular it offended against the democratic voting rights provisions, which required not total but greater equality than existed with respect to rural and urban voting and between constituencies. The decision of the court in that case was that a 25 percent disparity was justified; that is, that you could have up to 25 percent more voters in rural as opposed to urban ridings.

This decision followed in the tradition of the United States, where they have a much more strict rule; it's a one-person, one-vote rule, which was established sometime ago. Most other jurisdictions in this country in fact fall within the parameters of the British Columbia judgment. However, there are some jurisdictions which don't, and Alberta is spectacularly one of those which is very much out of kilter in terms of equality of representation. In fact, representation in Alberta is highly undemocratic. The electoral boundaries Act, totally neglectful of population, provides that the province shall be divided into 42

rural and 41 urban seats. The result of that is that we have such disparities as the constituency of Cardston with approximately 7,700 voters and the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud with over 29,000. Disparities of that nature just are not justified, regardless of what arguments one can make, and there are arguments for some balance in favour of giving rural areas greater representation. But the bottom line is that with or without this court case from British Columbia, it's very clear to anybody looking at the situation that in Alberta at the present time urban voters are entitled to more seats. In the event that the 25 percent disparity of the British Columbia judgment were accepted, that would mean, according to calculations which I have made -- using longhand division, I might note -- that this would result in 12 more urban seats in the province of Alberta, with no reduction in rural seats.

Now, it is likely that we will have a court challenge in the province of Alberta if this Legislature doesn't act with some dispatch, and we will then be faced with the situation, which I am sure is of some concern to the government, that we will find under the Charter of Rights that the courts then will be directing this Legislature what to do. Now, as has been noted by the previous speaker, there is to be no appeal in respect of the British Columbia judgment. I understand from British Columbians I've spoken to that there is an undertaking by the government of British Columbia that they in fact will be introducing legislation to rectify their representation system on the basis of the judgment providing for no greater than a 25 percent disparity.

I must say that my own personal view -- and I emphasize that it is my personal view -- is that the 25 disparity is in fact a reasonable one. I think there is a case that can be made for taking into account sparsity of population and other aspects of rural life in Alberta, and exact equality is not needed.

So that being said, I would like to say that I do support the establishment of this legislative committee but with some apprehensiveness, and apprehensiveness based on some of the comments of the previous speaker that this can be used as a basis for a delay. I think it's useful for a committee to review the situation as it currently stands on the basis of this particular court case, but only limited review, really, is needed. The need for changes is far too clear to justify any significant form of delay. We need action, and accordingly I would hope that we would have the undertaking of the Attorney General that the government will act quickly to deal with the report of this particular committee and move to rectify the unacceptable disparity which presently exists in this province.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to peruse the argument of reasonableness and the timing on this. I wonder if the hon. minister would consider an amendment to this motion which would allow for the courts of Alberta to receive a reference from the Attorney General that would ask the courts to provide the Assembly, to provide Alberta, with the appropriate formula.

My fear is this, Mr. Minister. My fear is that this whole process can get going and chew up time and resources only to have some challenger come along at a later time and put everything assunder. It seems to me that we are able to preclude that possibility by the simple reference to the courts of Alberta. Correct me if I'm wrong; I think we have that right. The Attorney General has the right to make a reference to the courts and directly to the Court of Appeal. While this process is starting, Mr. Minister, the courts could be in the process of considering that formula.

I penned out some wording, and the wording was: that the Assembly directs a reference to the courts of Alberta to determine the appropriate size of an Alberta constituency considering geography and population and in that regard that financial resources be made available to parties which the committee deems interested and appropriate to prepare and make submissions to the commission and to the courts. That way there is no doubt that the problem that has been referred to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo will be addressed, and we can have all this process concluded for the next election; that is, provided -- maybe the minister would like to make comment on this -- the minister is committed to having this matter concluded so that we do in fact have the matter resolved before the next election.

MR. HORSMAN: May I conclude the debate and . . .

MR. TAYLOR: If I might just make a point before closing debate, to show that the Liberal Party carries all sorts of opinions, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that bothers me in this whole process is the acceptance of the Supreme Court of British Columbia as a report that it did offend against civil rights and that 25 percent was the recommended formula. I would think that particularly a House and a group that time and again argues for an equal Senate -- in other words, saying that our sparsely populated area of the west has to have equal power with the densely populated area of the east -- to then come out and say that we should have a unicameral House, not a bicameral House, that goes very close to rep by pop in effect defeats our very same argument that we've been trying to make on the national scene, that we're overruled by the majority.

In fact, if we had equal representation, we'd be moving very closely to the ancient states of Sparta, Athens, and Rome. In those days, of course, a large population meant a large army, a large number of people carrying spears, and they ran the country. So what we'd have today, then, if you used the same idea, is a large number of voters in all the cities, and Canada would be run by half a dozen big cities.

I would like to toss out to the committee -- and by the way, the committee only has two rural people out of the seven on it, so they're not going to run away with any decisions. I'm rather surprised that the government didn't put more rural members on that committee. I would wonder whether or not it would be possible to go to the Supreme Court on our own behalf here making the argument that we have a bicameral society and the unicameral system we have in Alberta is an adjustment to get away from the bicameral society. Indeed, if we're going to have one person, one vote, we should have a double House system here. We should have an elected Senate in Alberta, which we had in Quebec -- not elected -- which we dissolved. But I think it's defeating the idea the Fathers of Confederation had when they put together the provincial and federal governments.

If you use a unicameral system, you have to make allowance. That may be 25 percent, as my hon. friend from Calgary-Buffalo has said, but it may be 50 percent. So I think the idea of trying to group us all into one compressed mold that we vary only a certain percent is in effect throwing out the unicameral system and defeating our own argument for an elected Senate to give us, with our sparse population, corresponding power in the

central core of this country.

Thank you.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. members who have spoken today. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. I'm a little surprised that he is prepared to accept the government's decision when the government is prepared to share with other parties in the Assembly in this whole process in developing what is fair and reasonable and proper to deal with this very serious question.

I would also think that perhaps he hasn't read the additional judgment in the same case in British Columbia in which another justice equal in stature to Madam Justice McLachlin ruled that the courts were not prepared to step in in the particular case and tell the Legislatures when and how to carry out the reapportionment that is so necessary. It's because there are two in fact semiconflicting, if I can put it that way, decisions in British Columbia that has made it more difficult for us in this province to assess how best to proceed. What we are doing . . . [interjections] We don't know whether or not there will in fact be an appeal, so quite frankly it's a matter that should be best dealt with by elected representatives who will go out in a fair and -- as select committees are -- impartial way and seek out the opinions of Albertans and obtain the best possible legal advice.

The hon. leader of the Liberal Party suggested the court reference. That might indeed take as long to arrive at a decision as the process we are suggesting here. Therefore, I think what has been worked out is reasonable and will in an appropriate time frame -- concerns have been expressed about that -- be able to report to this Assembly and then permit the government, based upon the wisdom and the advice of the members, to come forward and make recommendations. Then the government will be in a better position to act in the way of drafting appropriate legislation if changes are necessary.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Not as to the boundaries themselves -- I think we got a little confused on that today in our discussions. We recognize that redistribution and boundaries have to change, but it's the process as to whether or not what we have in place now will stand a Charter test, and we have to determine that. Quite frankly, the government is prepared to share with other members of the Assembly that process and that decision, and I think this motion therefore merits the support of the members of the Assembly.

[Motion carried]

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, it is proposed this evening when we reassemble to deal with third readings on the Order Paper, in order, and then to proceed to consideration of Bills on the Order Paper in Committee of the Whole. If there were sufficient time remaining during the course of the evening, we might be able to deal, I might just add as well, with some of the private Bills which are on the Order Paper for second reading and, if time were then remaining, to continue debate in second reading on Bill 15. That may be overly optimistic, Mr. Speaker.

[The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]