

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, March 20, 1990 2:30 p.m.

Date: 90/03/20

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

### head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

### head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Peter Johnstone, the British consul general, who lives in Edmonton but serves Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories. He assumed his office on November 1 of last year, and he's visiting us today. I can say that he joins a long line of distinguished predecessors who have represented the United Kingdom here in Alberta. I would ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of members of the Assembly.

### head: **Introduction of Bills**

#### **Bill 10**

#### **Small Power Research and Development Amendment Act, 1990**

MR. BRADLEY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 10, Small Power Research and Development Amendment Act, 1990.

The amendments increase the price paid for electrical power produced by small power producers, provide for an optional escalating price, and make small power producers eligible under the Utility Companies Income Tax Rebates Act. As well, the scope of the program will be broadened to include peat, solar, and geothermal resources as eligible fuels.

[Leave granted; Bill 10 read a first time]

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 10, the Small Power Research and Development Amendment Act, 1990, be put on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today the 1988-89 annual report of the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation, also the 1989 annual report of the Farmers' Advocate, and I am filing today the response to Motion 228.

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Public Contributions Act annual report for the year 1989.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Legislative Assembly today the fifth annual report of the Alberta Wild Rose Foundation.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association 1988-89 annual report, the Society of Management Accountants of Alberta 1988-89 annual report, the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta 1989 annual report, and the Psychologists Association of Alberta second annual report, 1989. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the Solicitor General.

### head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of 18 students, a teacher, and parents from the hamlet of Benalto. The teacher is Audrey Brattberg; the parents are Jackie Mooney, Brenda Kult, Marie Hindes, Pauli Smith. I would ask that they rise and that the Assembly give them a warm welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: The Solicitor General.

MR. FOWLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today 29 students from Robert Rundle elementary school, in the members' gallery. They are attending with Mrs. Marnie Dennis, Miss Janet Magdalinski, Mrs. Sue Barrie, and also Mr. Steve Andersen. I would ask them to rise and receive the customary acknowledgement of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway, followed by Vegreville.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce 15 students from the Alberta Vocational Centre, in my riding. They are taking English as a Second Language and are accompanied by Karen Barnes, their teacher. They're in the public gallery, and I would request that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. FOX: [remarks in Ukrainian]

I'm pleased to introduce seven friends visiting from Two Hills today, and I'd ask that they stand in the public gallery and receive the welcome of the members of the Assembly. They're John and Stella Eliuk, Olga Eliuk, Metro and Nancy Kizema, and Peter and Jennie Palinka. I'd ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming them.

### head: **Oral Question Period**

#### **Lead Poisoning in Medicine Hat**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the minister of Occupational Health and Safety and the Workers' Compensation Board. Ten workers and three children under the age of four have suffered serious lead poisoning in Medicine Hat. The children are still in hospital undergoing serious medical treatment and facing potential permanent brain damage as a result of this minister's department's negligence. In February his department sent out

detailed information to the co-owner of Alberta Recoveries & Rentals on the dangers of lead oxide and the safety precautions that are required. The company did next to nothing, and the Occupational Health and Safety department let the poisoning continue for over eight months. My question to this minister. How can this minister justify this totally irresponsible, dangerous lack of action by his department?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that we have people who are affected by lead in Medicine Hat, but let me set the record straight. On January 30, 1989, this company started to accept empty battery cases. On February 24 of '89, a complaint was laid; on February 24, '89, an order was given by Occupational Health and Safety to clean up the conditions. On March 7 a hygienist was at the site and again on April 26. On July 20 the compliance order expired and a new order was issued to provide a stop tag on washing equipment. On July 24 there was another visit to the site, conditions had improved, and the tag was removed. On August 11 there was a ventilation complaint from that site. On August 14 the site was inspected, and the company had had studies done and started to repair the system. September 28, 1989, was the first report by a doctor on a worker. On October 5 the hygienist officer was at the site, samples of air were taken, and instructions were given to the company to upgrade equipment and also to use respiratory equipment and improve the exhaust ventilation.

Mr. Speaker, since the first complaint of January until March 9 there were 16 visits to this site, and everything that was possible to be done by Occupational Health and Safety was done. The cleanup has commenced, and the building at this time is just about cleaned up and ready for work again.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, that's a totally inadequate answer. There are 10 workers and three children in the hospital. I don't care how many times you visited. Why didn't you shut them down? Why didn't you shut them down?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wasn't listening. We ordered the place shut down, and nobody could work in that place without respiratory equipment and coveralls and washing and cleaning up before they went home. That was done.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, is the minister dreaming? There are people who are seriously ill from this. Obviously if all the things were done properly, we wouldn't have three children in the hospital. I'm asking the minister: in view of this serious problem – and there may be many other serious problems around the world – instead of saying that the concerns we raise here are garbage, as he did before, and blaming the victims, is the minister prepared now to admit, and do something about it, that his department is in need of a major overhaul in this province before more people are affected?

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a great concern for the workers of this province, and so has this government. To suggest that nothing was done and that I lay the blame on somebody is not factual. We all have a responsibility – the employer, the employees – to work together. We would not ask any employee to visit and work on a site that's not safe.

Mr. Speaker, we've gone through all of this with Occupational Health and Safety. To add to it, on August 15, 1989, Occupational Health and Safety spent considerable time with those

workers on education programs in regard to lead. The report of the doctor was not made till September 28. So we worked with the workers as much as we could and as quickly as we could to see if we could rectify this, and that's being done.

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

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I was going to talk to the Treasurer today, but I want to stay with this minister in view of those answers.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, we don't have just a straight series of six questions in a row. I'll be interested to hear your question.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I will say to this minister again that if all the precautions and the things were followed, as this minister said, and his department had no responsibility, I want to ask this minister this simple question: why is it, then, that 10 workers and three children are in the hospital in very serious condition? Why is this, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. Leader of the Opposition. It's the same question that was asked in the previous main question and one of the supplementaries. We're on a second main topic.

MR. MARTIN: That's my second main topic.

MR. SPEAKER: It is not.

MS BARRETT: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Conceivably another issue with respect to WCB, but I don't know how you're going to do it.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is outrageous. This is a very serious matter, and if I can't ask this question of this minister . . .

MR. SPEAKER: No; sorry. Order. Sorry for the confusion, hon. leader, but that's not the way question period was set up, to have six straight questions on the same topic.

MS BARRETT: That's not what you ruled last week. You allowed it last week.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes Edmonton-Glengarry. [interjections] Order.

MR. MARTIN: No, sir, Mr. Speaker. This is new rules.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. Order.

MS BARRETT: You allowed it last week, Mr. Speaker, and there was no . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

Edmonton-Glengarry.

MS BARRETT: Brother. Oh, aren't you off the hook, Trynchy? Here's the guy that says the workers should be responsible . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.  
Edmonton-Glengarry.

### **Pension Liability**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Provincial Treasurer. About 195,000 present public servants and pensioners to eight pension plans that the minister administers and the taxpayers of Alberta guarantee have now - the fund that is set up has an unfunded pension liability of some \$9 billion. That is, the assets are in the vicinity of \$4 billion, but the amount owing to present and future pensioners is about \$13 billion. That's \$8,200 for every taxpayer should this unfunded pension liability be paid up. My question to the Treasurer is this: can the Treasurer explain how in a province that has reaped some \$100 billion in resource revenues since 1973, this unfunded pension fund liability could be allowed to become so astronomically high?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can see that the members of the government are celebrating the anniversary of a very successful election in this province. The reason I raise that point is that one year ago . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Let's try again; to the question.

MR. JOHNSTON: The reason I make that point - and as our lapel buttons show, we're confirming that victory - is that about one year ago the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry raised the very same question. What it seems to me is that he's running out of ideas, his research facility has obviously been exhausted, and there are no new fresh ideas coming from that side of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, because that's the very first question the leader of the Liberal Party asked me.

I can make it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that the pension funds of this province are, in fact, unfunded, but that doesn't mean the fear needs to be raised in the minds of those people who are now receiving benefits under that fund or will be receiving benefits, because that is misleading, certainly. Because it is clear that we have a view that the strength of this province is such that this government can meet those commitments over the period going out. We do believe that commitment which we have made is a sacred commitment, that there should not be any doubt that we'll make the pension fund whole and we'll make those payments to those people receiving the benefits. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the full assets of this government are behind that pension fund commitment.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I think the flower is fitting. It's red, and red ink is really the story of the way the Treasurer has operated.

Mr. Speaker, given that the information the Treasurer gave this House a year ago was that the pension fund was in fact improving when the real facts are that the pension fund grew some 5 percent worse this last year than the year before, how can the Treasurer sit there and not give us some sort of explanation as to how he's going to deal with this liability, which in 10 years will be \$14 billion?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry must be using a different forecast. Obviously he's using some kind of a crystal ball that most actuaries and most reasonable people would not accept.

Let me assure you that the reason that fund has an unfunded liability is because of the generosity of this government. We have said to those pensioners, to those people who are receiving benefits, "We will index your pension benefits." Now, there is not a contractual obligation to do that, Mr. Speaker, and we have said consistently over the period 1971 to last January as a matter of fact, "We'll provide you with an increase in your pension benefits about equal to a percentage of the CPI adjustment." Now, the pensioners have not paid for that, but the generosity of this government is such that we will continue to provide that benefit to pensioners. That's one of the reasons - that we think those people on fixed incomes should have some shelter from inflation - that that fund is unfunded.

Now, let me make it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that there are a variety of other assets that back those pension funds, assets of which we're very proud, assets which are significant: buildings, for example, that don't show up anywhere in anybody's financial statements; the heritage fund. Over \$13 billion of assets back those pension contributions.

MR. SPEAKER: That's very good. Thank you, hon. member.  
Final supplementary, Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm shocked and surprised that the minister isn't on top of this, because if he looks at the facts, the CPI, we are the second lowest in Canada in terms of what you call indexing up. It is only the province of Quebec that is the lowest in Canada. I'd like to ask the minister how he can give comfort to those 195,000 public servants who probably are fearing that the pressure that's growing because of this unfunded pension liability getting larger will mean a diminishing benefit of CPI or indexing or whatever. How can he comfort them?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know everybody else is as confused as the people who heard that question must be. Let me make it very clear that we have indexed the pension benefits, and nobody who is receiving that benefit has paid for it. It's a generous contribution to those people on pension by this government, and we intend to contain that.

With respect to the actual fund itself, Mr. Speaker, contributions are flowing in, investments are taking place, and I can assure you that the current service contributions are being balanced. We do recognize that there's a liability outstanding right now, but frankly, given the strength, given the future of this province, given the potential of this province, there is no doubt that we'll meet those commitments and those obligations.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Wainwright.

### **OSLO Project**

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Energy regarding the pullout of the federal government from the OSLO project. Last week the Premier indicated that there would be an immediate follow-up to pursue other interested parties and investors. Has this follow-up proven to be successful?

MR. ORMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first acknowledge the

important work that the Member for Wainwright does as this government's representative on the Syncrude board and his continuing interest in oil sands development.

With regard to the OSLO project, Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Wainwright indicated, the Premier has asked me to follow up with my counterpart in the province of Ontario. The Minister of Energy for that province will be visiting Alberta on April 2 for the energy ministers' conference in Kananaskis to deal with global warming. The minister has asked that we spend the following day, April 3, discussing the OSLO project. I've an update and briefing for that minister so that she can go back and make recommendations to her colleagues with regard to Ontario's participation or interest in that project.

MR. FISCHER: Supplementary. Has there been any indication from the OSLO partners that Ontario's participation will ensure that the comfort level needed would be there to see that the project would continue?

MR. ORMAN: Mr. Speaker, the OSLO partners certainly would welcome the participation of the province of Ontario or other provinces. They share the same disappointment that this government shared with regard to the federal government's lack of commitment to the OSLO project and apparent lack of commitment to the future supply/demand balance for oil in this country. I should say that there would have to be a significant restructuring of the deal to accommodate the province of Ontario under any terms. The vacuum created by the federal government obviously is one that cannot be replaced with regard to their powers with regard to taxation and other measures that allowed this deal to come together at the time it did. I'm hopeful that the province of Ontario will favour taking a position in the OSLO project. It's been reported to me that the Leader of the Opposition in the province of Ontario, at least the leader of the Conservative Party, has indicated that they would lend their support, based on the nature of the deal, to the government of Ontario with regard to participation in OSLO if the deal's right. Certainly that's what will be discussed.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### **Immunization of Young Children**

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we sat here last week, yet another 55 preschool-age children in Alberta became infected with whooping cough. Now the medical officer of health for the city of Edmonton says that this unnecessary epidemic is going to get a lot worse before it gets any better. Albertans have had enough of this government's cutbacks to health units and a government that would allow immunization rates to drop, as in the case of Peace River, to less than 75 percent, leaving fully 7,000 children in the province at risk. How can the Minister of Health have tolerated this decline in immunization rates, given that the officials in her own department were warning her of these potential dangers even last fall?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the hon. member is referring to when he talks about cutbacks in support to health units. Last year's support to health units was 5 percent. We've already announced that this year there would be a further increase of 3 percent, and certainly to link it to decreased support for health units is simply incorrect.

With respect to the immunization levels, we have discussed it on one occasion previously in the House, and certainly something that health units are working very aggressively to deal with is the outbreak of whooping cough that's occurring right now in Alberta. Nonetheless, I think the issue continues to be one of those immunization levels dropping because people are of the view that it's no longer necessary. So if I may repeat to all Albertans who may have particularly preschool-age children: to urge them to ensure that they contact their local health unit and ensure that their children are immunized.

REV. ROBERTS: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have had enough of ministers of this government who, like turtles, have moved ever so slowly and are afraid to stick their necks out and take some real action where it belongs.

Given that two years ago health units in the province did undertake an annual immunization campaign that got a 90 percent immunization level in the province and that those have now been discontinued because of a lack of action by this government and because of funding restraints, will the minister commit to at least a 6 percent increase in health unit budgets in the budget Thursday night so that health units can do the work they want to do, which is to prevent disease and to ensure a healthy future for all our children?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, no, I will not make that commitment, nor do I believe it would be appropriate for me to even suggest it to the Treasury Board or the members of this Legislature. Health units, like all other health providers within this province, have to live within the restraint that we believe is exceedingly important as we look to providing for Albertans a balanced budget as we move forward. We believe it's very fundamental in terms of our resolve as a government and our commitment that was made a year ago today to Albertans and for which they elected a major majority government in this House.

The issue of providing health units or directing, if you like, health units to put more of their resources into immunization is something that I have certainly spoken to the health units about but that I am not prepared to direct them to do. Health units in this province have a flexibility within standards that have to be set in this province to provide services within their community. If I were to direct, for example, the health units south of Red Deer to increase their immunization levels, as the hon. member is suggesting, it would be rather silly because, of course, the outbreak of whooping cough is virtually restricted to northern Alberta. I believe health units need to be commended for the work they are doing to provide antibiotic support for those people who have come in contact with the virus. Again, I would urge all Albertans to ensure their preschool-age kids are immunized.

### **Day Care Standards**

MS MJOLSNES: Mr. Speaker, parents and child care workers throughout this province are extremely concerned about this government's willingness to sacrifice the care of infants in day cares. This government's white paper on day care lowers the standards so that one worker can care for four infants instead of three, a very serious move. To the Minister of Family and Social Services. Given the concern for the healthy development

and future of children in this province, will the minister make a commitment to this Assembly that he will not jeopardize the care of infants by lowering the quality of care?

MR. OLDRING: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly make a commitment to this Assembly that we will not jeopardize the care of infants. Having said that, we have taken the time and opportunity to consult with Albertans, to consult with other provinces, and as a result of that we were able to observe that in other parts of Canada, in other provinces, they had ratios as high as 1 in 5 and 1 in 4. I didn't feel that it was appropriate to go as far as 1 in 5, but I did feel that perhaps a healthy balance was 1 in 4. In light of the new standards, the high training standards that we're putting in place for our day cares, we consider that to be appropriate.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would want to point out that these are minimal standards and that if day care operators or parents feel that something in a higher ratio or in a lower ratio is more appropriate, then they have every opportunity to do that.

MS MJOLSNES: Supplementary to the minister. Mr. Speaker, I'm quite shocked that this minister is not willing to make a commitment in the area of the quality of care for infants. By moving the ratio up to 4 infants to 1 worker, he is, in fact, lowering the quality of care. I'd like this minister to justify how he can jeopardize the care of infants in this province.

MR. OLDRING: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I've answered that question in part, but I guess, too, that I share some disappointment in the member opposite. I put a great deal of trust and confidence in parents being able to make appropriate choices for their children. I know that the member opposite hasn't been a parent yet, but I can say that I have a great deal of confidence in and give a great deal of credit to the parents of the children here in Alberta. I think they're able to make those kinds of decisions, and we support them in making those choices.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

### Desert Airlines

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public of Alberta is becoming very concerned with the thin line or no line that separates public and private business, especially with the cabinet. This is to the Premier. Anybody examining the public accounts of '87-88 will notice \$11,780-some paid to Desert Airlines. Since there is a Desert Airlines in Palm Springs and since \$12,000 is approximately the charter fare from Palm Springs to Edmonton and return, could the Premier tell the House whether he budgets for one or two of these flights each year?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would have to give me the details of the billings he's talking about, because I'm not familiar with any of them.

MR. TAYLOR: That's very interesting, Mr. Speaker. Simply put, then, does the Premier remember - he's in Executive Council - chartering a jet from Desert Airlines?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, again the same answer. The hon. member is going to have give me the details. I can't imagine doing that.

### Drug Addiction Treatment Program

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, many of our young people from Calgary are currently being treated by the program Kids of the Canadian West, a drug treatment centre in various areas throughout the United States. There have been some controversial views reported regarding these programs in the United States. Parents in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore have expressed gratitude and, indeed, support for the government's initiative in helping their young people who are addicted to drugs. These same parents have expressed a concern regarding the cost and the length of the programs. Could the chairman of AADAC please give the Assembly a follow-up as to the establishment of the program that he announced in the city of Calgary a year or so ago and if that program will be continuing in Calgary?

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the U.S. program is operating presently in New Jersey and in Utah. Those are the only two operations they have. With the recommendation of AADAC the government provided some matching moneys to the Kids of the Canadian West in Calgary to develop a program similar to the lines that were developed in the United States. However, I might indicate that with the controversy that has developed in Calgary, prior to making a recommendation to the government for matching funds to assist the development of this very needed program to assist those young people who are somewhat out of control and yet need the type of program that AADAC is not providing, we believe we have put in place the checks and balances that will encourage and offer a program in Alberta that meets with the laws of this land and also the integrity of the people that will utilize this program. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the society that is running this program are people of integrity in the city of Calgary, and I'm sure they would not want their personal integrity put at risk by running a program that would not be in keeping with the well-being of Albertans.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary is to the Minister of Education. Many of these young people who enter the program are only 12 years old. Could the Minister of Education indicate to the Legislative Assembly what would happen to these children's educational program? What does the department provide to these young people either during or after the program?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the chairman of AADAC has quite properly and quite well outlined the problem that these young people face. These are young people, young men and women, some in their early teens, some as young as the hon. member has suggested, who are compulsively addicted to drugs. They are sick; they suffer from a serious illness. The School Act makes provision for children that suffer from an illness. It says in the Act that

a student is excused from attending school on a day on which the school is open if

(a) the student is unable to attend by reason of sickness or other unavoidable cause.

The same is true that the Act provides that the student is excused if the parent shows sufficient cause to the board why the student should be excused, and the board then excuses the student for a prescribed length of time.

Mr. Speaker, these kids, if they are in school today, are failing miserably. More often than not, they are not in school; they are on the streets, and they are suffering from their sickness. So we

recognize as a government that these are young people who are caught in drastic circumstances that require drastic action. We have supported that, supported the Kids of the Canadian West program, and that program will operate within the laws and rules of this province. I'm very proud of the leadership that our government and, in particular, our Premier have taken in this drive, this fight against drugs and helping kids who've got this serious problem to get off being hooked on drugs.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Forest Lawn, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

### SAIT Funding

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in response to a question about the financial situation at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the Minister of Advanced Education indicated that he'd be meeting later that day with officials from that institute and that he would be glad to report back to the House. I now invite the Minister of Advanced Education to do just that. In particular, I'd like him to tell us what he learned from officials at SAIT, particularly with respect to the Batam project and SAIT's overall financial situation.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, as I responded yesterday to the Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology is a self-governing institution and under their Act carry out various programs. As I recall, the hon. member's question to me at that time was with regard to pouring some \$10 million into some project. I did indicate to the member that I was meeting later yesterday with the chairman of the board. I did meet and discussed matters of SAIT. I'm assured that the objectives of SAIT will be carried out with the funds appropriated by this Legislature. Any comment as to a confidential meeting between the minister and the chairman of the board would have to come from agreement between the chairman and the minister to release that information.

MR. PASHAK: Thank you. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the minister has reneged on the commitment that he made to the House yesterday.

The minister also said that he did not accept my comments because SAIT reports to the Auditor General, whose report would soon be tabled in this Assembly. However, if he'd taken the time to read the Auditor General's report, he would have known that the Auditor General was not able to complete the SAIT audit in time for inclusion in the '88-89 report because the SAIT officials were not ready for the audit. Given that the international education program was a major reason for that delay, what positive steps will the minister take to provide this Assembly with information as to what's happening with public money for that program?

MR. GOGO: Well, two, Mr. Speaker. One, I believe the Provincial Treasurer has already given notice that the budget for next year will be later this week, and I'll be facing and defending my estimates in this House early next week. I want to assure both the House and the hon. member that the funds appropriated from this House for programs to be operated by SAIT are secure; that is, the programs authorized will operate to the expectation of the students. Funds used by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology with regard to their international

activities, to my knowledge, come from reserve funds of the institution. There is no program, to my knowledge, in jeopardy, which I think should assure the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn that no student will suffer as a result of the programs not being put on. I don't know how else I can answer, Mr. Speaker, other than that this government strongly believes in the principle of self-governing institutions who operate within their statute. If there is any additional information that comes to my attention that I believe should be disclosed to the House, I certainly commit myself to doing that.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

### Public Service Code of Ethics

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services stated to this House, and let me quote from *Hansard*:

From time to time there are individuals who do not fulfill or meet the high standard that is required of a man and woman functioning in our society and working for the government of Alberta on behalf of all of the citizens of Alberta. When those circumstances do occur, senior management and individual departments take appropriate steps to improve the quality and the performance of the public service.

Mr. Minister, that was in response to a question of mine on the firing of three people in the minister's department. Let me point out that the immediate supervisor of Dennis Holowaychuk is quoted as stating:

"He was the best candidate and that's why he was hired," says safety boss [Mark] Egner. "He was doing a good job, he was enthusiastic, energetic, and knew the job well."

My question to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. Once and for all, will the minister come clean and admit that these firings were politically motivated and not a question of quality and performance of the individuals involved?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, there were several names mentioned yesterday in the question period, and I guess perhaps one mentioned directly and one inferred today. First of all, Mr. McMann was not fired or terminated. The gentleman resigned from his position with the public service in the province of Alberta. In terms of statements with respect to another individual, I have no idea what source the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is quoting from, but presumably it's a newspaper article. Information provided to me by Mr. Holowaychuk's immediate supervisor when Mr. Holowaychuk was a member of the public service of Alberta certainly does not confirm what the Member from Edmonton-Whitemud is saying.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that as late as yesterday, Don McMann is on record as saying:

There was never at any time the suggestion that it was my performance that resulted in my being removed from the department. The only explanation that was ever offered was my involvement in Mr. Wickman's campaign.

In view of that statement, will the minister assure this Assembly that he will investigate these firings, report back to this Assembly, and that if any improper conduct took place, those persons responsible will be dealt with in an appropriate fashion?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the question raised in the Legislative Assembly yesterday by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I have undertaken such an investigation. I did it this morning, and I want to reaffirm what

I said just a few minutes ago: in the case of one Don McMann, the gentleman was not fired or terminated. He resigned, Mr. Speaker. The gentleman . . .

REV. ROBERTS: Yeah; he was just suspended without duties.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order.

MR. KOWALSKI: The gentleman resigned.

REV. ROBERTS: He ruined the guy's family, Mr. Speaker. This guy's to blame for . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. [interjection] Order.

REV. ROBERTS: I saw what it did to his family.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, hon. member. If you need to be interrupted once more, the Sergeant-at-Arms will be called to ask you to leave the Chamber. There's no need for that.

REV. ROBERTS: This is shameful.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, hon. member.  
Mr. Minister, please.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, to reaffirm one more time, as a result of the matter raised in the Legislature yesterday by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I had that matter reviewed this morning. I want to reaffirm again what was provided to me by my senior administrator in the Public Affairs Bureau, that one Mr. McMann was not fired or terminated. This particular individual resigned under his own volition. I've never met the gentleman. I don't know who the gentleman is. I don't know what he would look like. Further, I understand that he was anticipating becoming an aldermanic candidate in the city of Edmonton last fall, and that may have had something to do with his resignation.

MR. TAYLOR: Pontius Pilate.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, there's no need for that. [interjection] There's no need, hon. member.  
Calgary-Fish Creek.

### **Day Care Policy Study**

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, following up on an opposition question earlier this afternoon directed to the Minister of Family and Social Services regarding his day care white paper, there appears to be considerable confusion in my own constituency in that some suspect that the white paper proposals are firm and inflexible and that the white paper process is, frankly, little more than political cosmetics. On the other hand, there are many others who hope that the white paper proposals are merely broad government intentions and that the minister, as reported in recent news media reports, is prepared to make major changes to those proposals. Could the minister today clarify just what he's trying to achieve with his white paper?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that I'm not anticipating any major changes to the proposals outlined in

the white paper. What this white paper speaks about is a commitment to shifting our focus and funding from operating more so into the subsidy side, and I would want to say that I am firmly committed to doing that. It also talks about putting a greater emphasis on helping lower income families and in particular single mothers. Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm firmly committed to doing that. The white paper also talks about minimum training requirements for the staff in day cares here in Alberta, and again I am committed to bringing in appropriate training requirements for staff.

What I hope to be able to do through this process is consult with Albertans in terms of implementing these changes. Are there appropriate adjustments that perhaps need to be made? I'm willing to look at that, Mr. Speaker. Is the timing appropriate? Perhaps we need to look at that. I think it's important that we work together with Albertans and day care advocates and parents before we finalize all of these things, but again I'm very committed to the thrust of the report.

MR. PAYNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, private day care operators in my constituency have been making predictions to day care users that the minister's proposed day care reforms are going to lead to a virtual doubling of fees. That's not my impression, I must admit, from my own reading of the white paper, but perhaps the minister could clarify today whose wallet is going to get hit and whose isn't when his reforms take effect.

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, again I would certainly share the member's concerns in terms of some of the distortions that are out there as it relates to impact. I can't see anything in this particular white paper that is going to cause an immediate, substantive increase in day care costs. We've structured it very purposefully to make sure that the children who are currently in the system will be impacted at a very minimal level. It's being phased in over a three-year time period, again to have minimal impact. Obviously there are some winners and losers. We are going to be asking families where income levels are over \$40,000 to pay a little more for their day care. There's no question about that, and that will be implemented over a three-year time period. On the other hand, some of those low-income families and single mothers that I'm having to cut off their subsidies will be allowed to retain their children in day care as a result of increasing the threshold limits. Again, I'm committed to making sure those low-income families in particular are receiving adequate support for their day care, because I would much rather help, again, those single mothers with their day care than to see them forced onto my social allowance caseload. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that all in all it's a very balanced, progressive day care program that'll take us into the '90s.

### **Kananaskis Village Resort Association**

MR. DOYLE: For the second straight year, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has criticized the Recreation and Parks department for failing to recover overpayments made to Kananaskis Village Resort Association. In his report for the year ended March 31, 1989, the Auditor General notes that the department still has not finalized arrangements to collect the \$635,000 in overpayments that the department made to the association, even though those overpayments were made between 1986 and 1988. To the Minister of Parks and Recreation. What measures have the minister and his department taken to recover the \$635,000 of taxpayers' money owed by the Kananaskis

Village Resort Association, and have these moneys already been repaid?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we dealt with this last year. Due to a difference between the bylaws of the Kananaskis Village Resort Association and the agreement that we had, there has been a time delay in the repayment schedule, but the \$635,000 that has been deemed an overpayment will be received back to the government in installments of roughly \$57,000 over the next 10 years. One of the concerns by the Kananaskis Village Resort Association was that they felt it was not an overpayment, because of the wording in their bylaws, and they did not want it declared in the terms of a remission. Nonetheless, an agreement has been set up with them, and we're finalizing the signature on it at this very time.

MR. DOYLE: Mr. Speaker, this is \$570,000 interest. Given the fact that these overpayments occurred between '86 and '88, how can the minister justify the unacceptable delay in recovering the funds from this association?

DR. WEST: In all due respect, it was identified as an overpayment, but due to accounting principles that could be subject to discussion. The Kananaskis Village Resort Association, of course, did not carry forward any of their expenses into the following year, and they felt that they were fully right to do so because of the wording of their bylaws and unfortunately got caught in the accounting principles of government. As a result, we have to reword and rebuild an agreement with them in order to readdress the payment back of this overpayment.

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MR. SPEAKER: Point of order from yesterday. The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

REV. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I would like your ruling on the point of order I raised yesterday. I raised a point of order on *Beauchesne* with respect to the letter the minister cited, and in the public interest thought it would be useful to have it tabled in the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, as the Chair left it yesterday, and it's quite clear in *Hansard*, the Chair left it up to the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Minister of Health to have a consultation about whether a citation had indeed taken place or not. So the Chair is not prepared to make a ruling on it, having requested both members to be in conversation with each other. Has that occurred? So we'll look forward to tomorrow.

REV. ROBERTS: It hasn't yet occurred, Mr. Speaker. We'll endeavour to do so. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Other points of order? Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I identified the point of order during question period. Subsequent to my identifying the point of order I wanted to raise during question period, I'll give you the citation, seeing as how you like them. It would be *Beauchesne* 410(9).

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in question period you did not allow the Leader of the Opposition to carry on with a second

series of questions contrary to a precedent, first of all, that was set last week and, secondly, contrary to an agreement between the House leaders and yourself that was hammered out in May of 1989 and again in March of 1990, as recently as March 8, 1990, shortly after the Speech from the Throne. The agreement was when the House leaders agreed to change the rules of question period so that last year, for instance, when the number of supplementary questions was reduced from three to two, certain leniency would be applied to returning to the same subject, Mr. Speaker, even within the same question period. That rule was further tightened this year by agreement of the three House leaders on March 8, actually on February 28 but subject to final ratification on March 8, at which time the leniency rule was once again discussed.

The citation that I listed says, and I'd like to quote into the record,

questions should not repeat questions already asked although this does not mean that other questions on the same point are out of order.

Mr. Speaker, I point out to you that the Leader of the Opposition asked a different question in the fourth question – in other words, the first of his second series to the minister of workers' health and safety – when he said: if what you have said is true, why is it that you have 10 people in the hospital? A completely different type of question. Now, I would argue that there is no rule in Standing Orders that (a) prevents the same subject from being brought back under any circumstances unless there is clear repetition of exactly the same question, (b) that the ruling violates an agreement between the House leaders and the Speaker, and (c) that the precedent must be observed and upheld.

Finally, there is no rule that says the Leader of the Opposition may not ask six questions on one subject, if that is his choice. In any event, the decision about questions is always the decision of the members by and large. We are the ones that write the Standing Orders. We are the ones that sponsor motions with respect to them. It is our decision, Mr. Speaker, and therefore I request that in future, should the Leader of the Opposition or any other member of any other caucus choose to return to a subject of her or his choice, that that be allowed.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, let's deal with some other points that need to be mentioned as well in terms of this point of order. The statement that was read to the House on March 9 by the Chair did include within it the first two main questions with supplementaries to the Leader of the Official Opposition or his designate. Nowhere in that statement does it talk about latitude with respect to the number of questions and the topics. As to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands' various points about what was in the agreement with the House leaders, the Chair will go back and check the notes which I kept of all of those meetings.

I would then go on to point out that what has been happening in terms of questions period – and I had these three *Hansards* pulled, those for March 13, 14, and 15. On the 14th and the 15th the general pattern has been established by the Leader of the Opposition of asking questions on two separate issues on the main questions, and that has been the understanding of the Chair. Now, there was deviation from that, indeed, on March 13 with respect to the main topic of the Oldman River dam. The Chair has also taken the time to look through what transpired on that day, and indeed in the opinion of the Chair even though it was the same topic, there were six distinctly different questions asked.



MS BARRETT: There were today too.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, would you do the Chair the courtesy of waiting?

MS BARRETT: All right.

MR. SPEAKER: Thanks a bunch.

The Chair has called for the Blues. One of the difficulties encountered here is that with preambles that take a bit of time and seem to throw everything but the kitchen sink into the preamble, then it's a bit confusing to the House, let alone to the Chair, as to what question is indeed being asked. This led to part of the difficulty today. Let us also remember that the Leader of the Opposition by his own admission said that he intended to ask his second series of main questions to the Provincial Treasurer but decided that he wanted to continue to deal with the original minister as questioned, the minister responsible for Occupational Health and Safety.

Now, in one of the preambles to one of the questions, the Leader of the Opposition made reference to the three children in hospital. And then later on in what was supposed to be the second main series of questions, following on admonition from the Chair to make certain that they were going to be six different questions – because the Chair did say, "Hon. member, if we don't have just a straight series of six questions in a row, I'll be interested to hear your question." – the Leader of the Opposition went on to ask a question that talked about "10 workers and three children are in the hospital in very serious condition." So that in turn led to some of the confusion and led to the decision by the Chair to halt the series of questions.

However, let's go on to a few other things. With reference to *Beauchesne* 409(8), there is this matter of

A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again.

That was part of the confusion of the day. Also, *Beauchesne* 410(9):

Questions should not repeat questions already asked although this does not mean that other questions on the same point are out of order.

So this reference was quoted by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and perhaps she should go back and look at what the full meaning of the sentence is, as will the Chair.

MS BARRETT: I did.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. This is not dialogue time.

The Chair also then asks hon. members if they would be kind enough to refer to their copies of *Erskine May*. So it is that on page 292:

Questions already answered, or to which an answer has been refused, or on secret matters.

This is not a secret matter, of course.

Questions are not in order which renew or repeat in substance questions already answered.

And then *Erskine May* page 284. The Chair would quote two portions from page 284. The general heading is "Speaker's control of questions."

The Speaker is the final authority as to the admissibility of questions.

And later on:

When a question has been refused and the Member concerned wishes to make representations to the Speaker on the matter, the practice is for these to be made privately to the Speaker and not

raised by way of a point of order in the House.

The Chair listens to the concern as raised by the Leader of the Opposition and also the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and will take those comments into consideration in future question periods.

#### head: **Orders of the Day**

CLERK: Written Questions.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I would move that both Written Questions and Motions for Returns stand and retain their precedence on the Order Paper.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. [interjection] Order please. [interjection] Order please, hon. member. Just half a moment, please.

We know that we're still in the early parts of start-up with respect to this sitting of the Legislature, but a bit of confusion has come in. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, could you move that as two separate motions so we could, as has been our practice – but I can understand your confusion as well as ours. A separate motion, please.

#### head: **Written Questions**

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions stand and retain their precedence on the daily Order Paper.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

#### head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns stand and retain their precedence on the daily Order Paper.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You see my concern. I was afraid that both would be passed, and I thank you for sorting out that confusion on the part of the Deputy Government House Leader.

I wish to object to the idea that motions for returns stand and retain their place on the Order Paper this week. They were ordered to stand and retain their place last week. I think the time has come for some answers from this government. I myself have about half a dozen or maybe as many as eight questions on the Order Paper, and there are a few of them that do have some urgency, particularly considering that we know the government already has the information. For instance, Motion 152, the copy of the Alexander report; it's long since due that that report was out to the public. The government, we know, is planning on privatizing AGT, and yet we don't get a look at that report. I don't see why we should have to wait until after the privatization motion has been taken before we get a look at the report to see what reasons are given.

Another example, Mr. Speaker: Motion 155 standing on the Order Paper in my name, the Olympia & York Developments lease agreement that this government signed that . . . Well, I won't get into the details; we'll save that for a time when I want to debate this specific motion. But it is time. I mean, the

government has this contract; they know what the terms are. There would be no extra work. It does not take time to find the answer to this question, so there is no good reason why they shouldn't bring that information forward immediately rather than leaving this to stand and retain its place on the Order Paper.

One other one I'm particularly interested in is the financial statement for 354713 Alberta Ltd., commonly known as Softco. That report is ready, Mr. Speaker. I myself have phoned the Treasurer's office several times. I keep getting this answer: "Well, we've only got one copy, so we can't send you a copy." Mr. Speaker, they can make a copy and send me a copy. The company, Softco, itself does not send out financial statements; it is the responsibility of this Treasurer to do that. Two years ago he kept us waiting until the end of the session on July 6 and finally handed out the '87 report. It was 15 months out of date when we got it. Last year he released it on the day the Assembly started. Why hasn't he released it by now? We've been asking for the report. We know the Auditor General has done the work. We know it's available. There is no reason in the world why this government shouldn't make this report available at this time.

The loan guarantees on Motion 150 also are something that we should be given information on, and Motion 160, General Systems Research. Here we've got a company that's lost over \$30 million of government money, or taxpayers' money, shall we say. It's about to be sold, and we get no answers from this government. They hide two reports that we know very well were paid for by taxpayers' dollars and belong to the people that put up the money. Then the minister just gets up and says, "Oh well, we should just let these all stand and retain their place on the Order Paper."

Now, I understand there are some of them that are complicated enough that it may take some time to get the answers together, so I'm quite prepared to be patient for a little while. But several of the ones I just named could be answered immediately. In fact, we shouldn't even have had to put them on the Order Paper. The answers, these documents, should have been out there long before now.

There are a number of my colleagues who also have questions on the Order Paper, and I'm sure the same thing applies to them, Mr. Speaker. So I'm not in favour of this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.  
Question?

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: There is a call for the question.

[Motion carried]

MR. SPEAKER: There is a procedural. . . Well, we can't deal with it. I'm sorry. The Chair wanted to deal with an item between Forestry, Lands and Wildlife and the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. It will have to hold till Thursday. Thank you.

#### head: **Motions Other Than Government Motions**

202. Moved by Mrs. Hewes:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to adopt as a primary objective the elimination

of poverty in Alberta by

- (1) raising social allowance rates,
- (2) raising child care subsidies,
- (3) increasing the delivery of family support programs through school nutrition and head start programs,
- (4) developing low-cost housing alternatives,
- (5) restoring the rental tax credit,
- (6) raising minimum wage rates and reviewing them annually,
- (7) establishing pay equity,
- (8) reforming pension requirements,
- (9) increasing benefits to part-time workers,
- (10) improving programs for training and retraining, and
- (11) phasing in a simpler universal income support program in conjunction with the government of Canada.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's often said that the poor are always with us.

MR. McEACHERN: That's just a Tory plot. They don't want to do anything about it.

MRS. HEWES: Yes, I think you're probably right; it is a Tory proposition.

To be sure, Mr. Speaker, all of us don't have equal resources or equal assets, but I think it's incumbent on us to deal with and to develop some kind of strategy that will reduce the inequities, the soul-destroying poverty that is not as visible in Alberta as it is in India but is still very visible in this wealthy province.

Mr. Speaker, what does it do to you? Well, the poor, wherever they are, are powerless. They have little credibility, they're lacking opportunities, they're poor in spirit as well as poor in pocketbook, and they're often poor in possibilities. Their chances to get out are few; the chances of their children are few. Their future, for the children, is bleak.

Mr. Speaker, like it or not, our society in North America is based on affluence. It's a distortion, in my mind, but it seems as though if you have financial resources, you have credibility and you are believed to be someone of substance, someone who carries a fair amount of weight and has power. If you are poor, you are not thought to be of a certain kind of value. Mr. Speaker, the poor are not shiftless; they're not ne'er-do-wells; they're not wasting money. There simply isn't enough money for them to manage, as a rule. The effect on children of the poor is devastating. Their health is often at risk, their opportunities are reduced, and their education may be curtailed.

So whose responsibility is it? In many cases I think the government blames the victim for being poor. We often blame the system for creating poverty, and we sometimes even blame the government. In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter who's to blame. I think we've all got to put our heads together and resolve it. My difficulty is that we have many things at hand here, many things at hand, but we do not somehow put them together to develop any sort of comprehensive strategy, any comprehensive means to deal with the problem that's visible around us.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Poverty in Alberta: how real is it? Well, some would have you believe that no one is really poor in this province of ours. The poverty line here, that nebulous kind of figure, is based, Mr. Speaker, on a family that spends more than 58.5 percent on the

essentials of food, clothing, and shelter. In Alberta it's roughly \$12,800 for a single person per annum, \$25,500 for a family of four. In a rural community that would be reduced to \$8,700 for a single person and \$17,300 for a family of four. So we say to ourselves: Well, how real is it? What are the manifestations of that kind of life in our affluent province? And we see them all around us: family break-up, violence, mental illness, hungry children, children and families in conflict, the existence of food banks, substandard living conditions, and poor nutrition. I could go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, just to quote from a recent article in *Maclean's*: The executive director of the Ottawa-based National Anti-Poverty Organization said that for children to go hungry in an advanced industrialized society like Canada's "shows how much our values have slipped."

When we in this Legislature know that there are children going hungry to our schools in the cities and towns and rural schools of this province – and that is having to be dealt with by community organizations as best they can – when we have that evidence, Mr. Speaker, we do see how very much our values have slipped. Experts, in fact, say that

the poverty-line statistics fail to reflect the fact that the number of Canadians facing extreme poverty is actually increasing as a result of high rents, rising taxes, low minimum wages and welfare payments that are not indexed.

Gerard Kennedy, who is now the director of Toronto's Daily Bread Food Bank and was formerly the director of the city of Edmonton's Food Bank, says:

Our impression of a decline in poverty is illusory, because there has been an increase in the numbers of people who have less money. The depth of poverty is increasing.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question about that. And according to the latest National Council on Welfare statistics:

Canada's hard-core poor include 56.7 per cent of the nation's 390,000 single mothers, more than half of all single women over 65, half of all the single young people aged 16 to 24 and 16.1 per cent, or 913,000, of children under 16 [years old].

Almost a million of Canada's children, Mr. Speaker, are living in poverty, and that, I believe, is unacceptable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have some choices here, and we have a number of opportunities right now, at hand, that we can make use of to deal with the situation and to develop a strategy to improve it. We can, in many cases, deal with the manifestations of poverty in our communities in Alberta. We can deal with the results, and we have methods available already. We can also deal with the causes, and we have some systems in place to do that if we'll put the resources at their disposal.

Mr. Speaker, no one expects the government to do it all. The fact of the matter is that the government has not taken leadership here to develop any kind of comprehensive look at what is happening in our province nor a comprehensive solution. I expect the government to show leadership, to work with our community agencies, with our churches, with the institutions of our community, and with the poor themselves, who often have the very best ideas about how their problems can be solved and how their soul-destroying poverty and loss of motivation can be dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, just another comment. About half of the Canadians who live below the poverty line are employed, so we know now that employment is no guarantee whatsoever against poverty or against hunger. When you're poor in Alberta these days, food becomes an option, and increasingly shelter is becoming an option as well. I've suggested a number of ideas here that we can look at and that we could combine to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with this ever increasing

problem in our province that I think is unacceptable to the people of Alberta. To ignore poverty is one thing; to ignore children in poverty I believe is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the first suggestion I've made to the Assembly is that we should look at raising social allowance rates. Now, the minister has made a number of comments and, indeed, refers in the throne speech to some move that we as yet do not know; it remains a mystery. These rates have not been changed since 1982 except, in some cases, to reduce them slightly. I think they need to be looked at. I don't know what it's like in most families here, but in my family certainly the cost of food has gone up, the cost of shelter has gone up, and the cost of utilities has gone up. These affect the poor, to say nothing about what's going to happen the beginning of next year when the GST comes into effect. That's when the poor in our province are really going to be hurt. The social assistance rates have not changed since 1982. There are a number of community agencies who have done extensive research as well as the department itself. We know what the circumstances are. We've had promises to look at them. They have not been changed since then. I believe that in eight years the situation of the poor in our province on social assistance has become quite desperate.

Mr. Speaker, the second item that I think can be looked at immediately – I'm pleased to see that the minister has in fact announced that the subsidies for low-income families for child care will be increased. As yet we haven't had any firm information on that, and that's putting people in a considerable case of anxiety. Families must, as prudent parents, make plans, and they can't do them in two weeks or two months. People need to know now whether or not they're going to be able to go back to school or to take a position in employment. So we certainly have to have the precise and detailed amounts of the subsidies, and we have to know it now in order that our families can deal with this and make their own plans. I am pleased that the minister has raised these subsidies. It will, I believe, help very low-income families, but as yet we are still in doubt as to the turning point and where the middle-income families will find themselves when the day care thing settles down, if it ever does.

Mr. Speaker, the third item that I've raised is to increase "the delivery of family support programs through school nutrition and head start." If there was ever, in any of these, a program that in fact can deal with the evidence of poverty in children, this is it. We are just not putting the kind of resources into school nutrition and head start that we should be. These programs are proven programs. Head start will work and has been proved to work if it is followed past grade 1 and follows the children in the early elementary grades of school. We have a number of programs operating in the province only through community support, only, really, through the energetic work of many, many volunteers and church workers who are able to put these programs into place for children who are going to be disadvantaged when they reach their school years. These programs bring them along and make it possible for them to succeed in elementary grades and to move on from there. Otherwise, we would have the child who fails in grades 1, 2, and 3, and from then on we all know what the circumstances of that child are going to be. I believe the head start program would give a tremendous advantage to the children who are being raised in circumstances where their opportunities are going to be grossly reduced unless they have a boost ahead.

The school nutrition programs in Edmonton and Calgary and a number of other places are being run by inner-city churches and school systems and community organizations, and they are

having modest success, Mr. Speaker. I believe they need our commendation. I hope the government is aware of what's happening with them. They are written up widely in our province in magazines and newspaper articles. They are programs that our communities run to ensure that children who come to school hungry and who cannot learn as a result of that are given some kind of nutritional hot meal or snack.

Mr. Speaker, there's a school in Edmonton that I know of where the teacher, when the kiddies come to school in the morning, feeds them first and then lets them have a nap. Then, this teacher says, by about 11 o'clock these children, who come to school hungry and tired and often poorly clothed, are ready to learn, to go to school. It doesn't sound as though that's a common kind of occurrence. We have difficulty believing that that really is happening in the province, but it is, and it's happening right around the corner from each one of us. We could all visit schools, I'm sure, in our ridings where there are children hungry.

Mr. Speaker, it isn't an easy situation to deal with. From time to time people have said to me, "Well, that's the parents' responsibility," and, to be sure, it is. But I cannot leave to the children the problems of the parents. I cannot invest in the children the problems of the parents. If parents are not responsible or do not have the resources to provide nutritional meals to their children, then I think we must care for the children and keep them central in our minds and in our activities and not be too punitive to those parents who lack either motivation or knowledge or understanding or resources or a combination of the above. Mr. Speaker, I can't speak highly enough for those community organizations and churches that are working in nutritional programs, and I hope our government will see fit to include those in comprehensive strategy and planning to deal with poverty in the province.

Mr. Speaker, another one that I've mentioned to you here is low-cost housing alternatives. We have in recent months been critically aware of the cost of housing, particularly for low-income renters. Our caucus has begged the government to restore the income tax credit as an up-front grant to people whose income is at the poverty line or slightly above it and who are in rental circumstances where the rents have gone up. I don't believe in rent controls, but I do believe we can do a great deal to alleviate the circumstances that these low-income working poor in our communities are experiencing because of the increased rents.

Mr. Speaker, I also don't think we've been very creative in developing low-income housing or rent-to-income housing with housing stock that we already have. I would hope that the minister responsible would work with other ministries to ensure that we are negotiating with our municipalities to make sure that those units that now belong to AMHC and are coming on the market, if they are available and not purchased by the owner or not needed by the owner, in fact could be made available to the community for family housing for rent-to-income. I don't believe that has been researched significantly – there hasn't been a need to – and I would hope that the ministry is involved in that at present.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe that we should be looking more closely at the possibility of co-operative housing. It isn't everyone's choice, but it does offer stable housing at rent-to-income in an environment that I think is very supportive and has been very positive in a number of our cities for low- and middle-income people. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that this province has not secured its share of the CMHC funding for co-

operative housing in recent years, and I would hope that we'd go after that.

Shelter makes low-income people very vulnerable, Mr. Speaker, and I think we need to deal with it immediately. I know the minister has assured us that he's studying the matter and looking at it. I hope we'll see some action very quickly.

Mr. Speaker, the minimum wage in our province is \$4.50 an hour. I've already told you what the poverty line would be. A worker who is at \$4.50 an hour trying to support himself or a family would be making \$9,500 per annum. After contributions he might take \$8,200 home. This is well below the poverty line in our province. It seems to me that we need to look at this minimum wage on the basis of an annual review, to index it if necessary, or at least to review it every year and relate it to what a worker can earn at that wage and how, with any kind of dignity, he could support a family of two, let alone a family with children.

Mr. Speaker, we are also seeing an increase in the number of part-time jobs. Alberta leads the nation, I believe, in the creation of part-time jobs. There's been a large increase in part-time employment according to the Canadian welfare council and the Canadian Council on Social Development. The losses in full-time jobs – 35,000 part-time jobs have been created in Alberta, but 34,000 full-time jobs have been lost during the same time period, so we are not really gaining on it. The difficulty of part-time workers is the absence of benefits. Most of them in fact are women, many the sole support of their families. We have on a number of occasions urged the government to review the labour legislation and the employment standards legislation to make it mandatory for part-time workers to be paid benefits on a pro rata basis. I think this is the kind of piece of legislation that could be done taking into account the total strategy of an attack on poverty, and would create a much fairer situation.

Pay equity is another item on my list, Mr. Speaker. Again, we beg the government to consider bringing in pay equity legislation, and the government showing leadership and showing the way for private business and industry. This is just a question of fairness: simply fairness to women. Seventy-three percent of our part-time workers, by our own statistics in Alberta, are women. They are not being paid adequately, they are not being paid fairly, and we're expecting them to support families. These form the large bulk, as I quoted before, of the poor in our country.

Mr. Speaker, we need to look at pension requirements. We have not reviewed pensions for women. The advisory council on women has discussed this matter on a number of occasions without any response from the government, without any action from the government whatsoever. Again, a question of fairness and equity, particularly to women who are between 60 and 65. Divorced women do not have access to the pension that widows do. It creates an unfairness. Single women do not have it, and they form a large part of those in poverty in our province. Perhaps not as visible as the people in some of our inner-city neighbourhoods, but they are living in very difficult, very reduced circumstances, and I believe we are not talking about large amounts of money here. We are talking about fairness for women in reforming the pension requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I've already spoken to increasing benefits to part-time workers. Programs for training and retraining are noticeably absent in our throne speech this year. We have in former years concentrated on those. I don't see any this year, and I'm disappointed in that. I hope, as we get through our budget, that more will be revealed to us about the government's

programs for training and retraining, because I believe herein lies the answer. So many of those who are poor who are in jobs are overtrained and are underemployed at present, and unable to utilize their full skills.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's time that we looked very seriously at universal income support. The federal Conservative government has been giving active consideration to this type of plan for a number of years. Part of the motivation here, of course, is to create a simpler, more effective – probably a system that would cost us less money and would still put more money into the hands of the consumer who most desperately needs it at the time of their need. It is a program that would, of course, have to be done in collaboration with the federal government. I think it's time this government showed some initiatives, took some leadership, and entered into some discussions at a point in time where our federal government is capping our CAP payments and reducing our transfer payments. Now is the time to open up this discussion with them.

Mr. Speaker, the Macdonald commission reviewed and recommended the notion of universal income support. It's not a new idea. I think its time has come. I think it's time, and perhaps we could, if we had the political will in this province to develop some kind of a comprehensive strategy to deal with poverty in our province, begin to develop a plan that would be suitable and would be compatible with the provincial needs that would lead to collaboration with the federal government to do the same across the country.

Mr. Speaker, just finally, I, like a lot of people, have some concerns about government priorities and how priorities are set. Most of us deal with poor people in our communities and with institutions who work with poor people, and we want to see them continue to get support. I have had some serious questions asked of me of the expenditures on Family Day, the expenditures made in the advertisements regarding women, and the expenditures of such things as the Hyndman video. Mr. Speaker, to my sorrow, the Hyndman report did not in any way deal with the health of poor people. They mention it a number of times in the narrative, to be sure, but there are no recommendations that will help us be able down the road to make sure that people, poor children, have good health. I think that's very important to Canadians and Albertans.

So, Mr. Speaker, the other regret that I have and I must express here – and I will again, if I have an opportunity – is the fact that the throne speech did not deal with poverty either. It's as though this is invisible in our province. We don't want to talk about it. We really don't believe that people need to be poor, or if they're poor, we simply feel that they are not well motivated or shiftless, and I don't think that is the case in Alberta today. I think it's incumbent upon our government, working with the institutions of our communities, with the community organizations, with the people of our communities, and with the poor in our communities, to develop some kind of comprehensive strategy instead of trying to squeeze people into little boxes and programs in which they don't fit.

We are spending a lot of money on a variety of programs, Mr. Speaker. I submit to you that they are not working well to the advantage of the consumer and that we are going to see what I did predict in my early remarks: a lessening of our values of people and an increase in the depth of poverty in our province. Mr. Speaker, investing in a comprehensive strategy is investing in people, and really, I think that's all there is; I think that's what it's all about. I hope the government will take my motion seriously. I don't expect governments to go it alone; by no

means. I think this is a comprehensive community/government/consumer kind of plan that we need to develop to look at and deal with poverty and eliminate it in whatever way we can in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar.

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to join in the debate today on this particular motion, Motion 202. It's an important motion, and it is important that issues such as these receive debate in this House. I want to assure the hon. member that this government indeed takes the objective of that particular motion very seriously.

The motion before us urges the government "to adopt as a primary objective the elimination of poverty." It's an admirable and a worthwhile objective, and I truly believe the hon. member's concern is a genuine concern. Although I agree with the general objective of the motion, I do have some severe difficulty, Mr. Speaker, with the 11 specific directions that are outlined in the motion. This difficulty arises in part from the fact that our government has worked and continues to work towards realizing that objective. We have leadership towards that objective, and I intend to elaborate on the specific actions our government is pursuing to realize that objective. We've had some successes there, Mr. Speaker. I will elaborate on those as well. Perhaps the hon. member is unaware of those directions our government is pursuing, and that is unfortunate.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have difficulty with the shotgun approach exhibited here. What the hon. member is proposing is that we shoot in all directions and hopefully we will hit something. All 11 directions, Mr. Speaker, recommend arbitrary expenditures without clear thought and planning. Perhaps my background in planning brings that to the forefront, because I feel that one needs to have a strategy. The hon. member referred to that. We need a strategy in order to achieve some of these objectives, but sadly that strategy is lacking in this particular motion. Expenditures without clear thought and planning are frivolous, and it's my considered opinion that they very seldom solve the problems that exist. Throwing money at a problem very seldom solves it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, when he spoke on March 12. I'm quoting from *Hansard*, page 36, the second column, about two-thirds down the page.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me say first of all that the government does spend enough money in health care. There's absolutely no doubt about that. We have to begin to spend the dollars wisely in health care.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that comment is very appropriate to this particular motion we are debating here today. We need to spend the money more effectively, more efficiently, and more economically. Apparently, just like the Liberal Party and their leader in this respect, because they're trying to have it all ways – and I'm talking here about the comments that have been made with respect to balancing the budget and fiscal responsibility. Here we see the other side of that particular discussion that's brought forward: an expenditure of money.

I want to specifically refer to that fiscal responsibility that is very important. I recall quite clearly over a year ago that the Leader of the Liberal Party went around campaigning and lifted up his dog-eared wallet in the air and referred and inferred that the Liberal Party and the members of the Liberal Party were the only ones that would accountably spend or allocate that money

that is found in every resident's wallet. Well, I have some difficulty with that concept, and I think it shows in this particular motion what the actual intent in the agenda of the Liberal Party is. They want to control all of the money in every taxpayer's wallet, and this is a good indication of how they are going to do it: they're going to use it and spend it on social programs. Now, I have no difficulty in spending on social programs, but again it has to be done effectively and efficiently and not at random, as the member is proposing with respect to the 11 directions – that outline – each one of which proposes to throw additional money at those particular items that have been raised.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk more about fiscal responsibility. I think that again the Liberal Party is trying to have it all ways. It was the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud who fought for a 52 percent increase in their leader's salary, who fought and claimed they didn't want to be left in the dust and wanted a 24.7 percent increase in their caucus allocation. Well, that is not fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, further with respect to fiscal responsibility and the use of our taxpayers' money most effectively, I want to draw your attention to the resolutions that have been considered by the Liberal Party. I believe there are some 188 resolutions that have come forward, 85 of which incorporate and call for massive expenditures. But, at the same time, the Liberal member is talking about balancing the budget and fiscal responsibility. Well, there's some contradiction inherent in those claims, and I can't quite see how they might resolve that. I have some difficulty there.

I need to restate that the objective is good, Mr. Speaker. The 11 directions outlined in the motion remind me somewhat of the definition of a metaphysician. Lord Bowen provided the definition of that, and I quote: A metaphysician is a person who goes into a dark cellar at midnight without a light, looking for a black cat that isn't there. That is exactly what we have before us. There is no strategy, no planning on how we might achieve those objectives of eliminating poverty.

AN HON. MEMBER: And no black cat.

MR. GESELL: And no black cat, Mr. Speaker, at all.

But now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to submit to you that this government in fact is exercising excellent leadership and stewardship in working towards elimination of poverty. We have a strategy to meet that particular objective. The hon. member has referred to that strategy that we should have, and it is in place. We have worked towards that objective, and in this area our government has achieved some successes. I want to deal with those more specifically, but I want to first of all list a number of examples of evidence where our government's commitment is there, our leadership is there, to realize this particular objective, this goal.

We have an excellent education system, and I need to mention, Mr. Speaker, that I speak from experience, sir. I've worked as a trustee for Strathcona county. I'm also a member of the Education caucus committee, and I have a genuine interest in that field. We have an outstanding health care system. We have quality child care, and I want to elaborate more on that particular aspect because I'm personally involved in that. We have varied housing programs. We have employment training initiatives. We have income support for people who are in severe financial need. We have aid for disabled people of all ages. We have special assistance to the elderly and to widows and widowers. We provide counseling and support

for troubled, abused, and neglected children. We further provide counseling for individuals with alcohol or drug abuse problems. There's education, housing, and counseling for native people. We have employment programs to assist individuals to re-enter the work force and the job market. We have housing assistance to senior citizens and low-income families.

Mr. Speaker, in view of the number of initiatives and programs we have in place and the scope and variety of these programs, I cannot quite see how it would be possible for anyone to state that this government is not doing its job. We are doing our job; we are showing leadership towards the elimination of poverty in our society. It may come as a bit of a surprise to the members on the Liberal and NDP benches that, in terms of social program expenditures, the Alberta government's per capita spending is higher than that of any other province or even the federal government. Our commitment to addressing the needs of Albertans is very, very clear.

I want to refer to an item with respect to family incomes. I've referenced and I've brought with me a copy of the *Edmonton Journal* of Tuesday, December 5. The hon. members on the Liberal and NDP benches apparently do their research from these publications, and perhaps they've read this. They should have read it, because it's important. "Family incomes up, poverty levels down": this is a report from Statistics Canada. It talks about the average family income.

It ranged from a high of \$52,764 in Ontario to a low of \$34,535 in Prince Edward Island. Alberta was second with [an average family income of] \$46,283.

Those numbers come from Statistics Canada, Mr. Speaker. It gives an indication that we are, in fact, meeting the objective and achieving some success in meeting that particular objective. In fact, our government in Alberta currently spends approximately 77 percent of its annual budget on social programs: a considerable expenditure. But the real issue is not how much our government spends on social programs. No, the real issue really is, and it comes down to, the difference in the approach by our government and by the members from the Liberals and New Democratic Party in eliminating poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I need to talk a little bit about the poverty lines that have been referenced by the hon. member. It's pretty difficult, and I have some problems, actually, with the poverty line, because it is income related. Every time you achieve some gains in eliminating poverty, that line moves – it's a flexible line – and it becomes increasingly more difficult to get to that line. Now, the income cutoffs that are normally used are not poverty lines, but they continue to be used as an indication of poverty in a province or in a country. The setting of those lines involves a value judgment, but further than that it includes and it does not account for such people as the young, who have perhaps income below the normal salary because they are just beginning their earning careers; it also includes the elderly who have accumulated, perhaps, some wealth, and their incomes then are included in that average but they do not actually earn that much of an income. It skews that eventual line that is indicated.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little about the comparisons that are sometimes drawn between the programs this government has and the programs that exist in Sweden. Sweden is held up as an example . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: There's no comparison.

MR. GESELL: Exactly; there is no comparison. And I will give you some comparisons right now.

Sweden is held up as an example in the majority of cases

because of income equality, social security from cradle to grave, national child care programs, and legislation aimed at elimination of discrimination and sexism. It is claimed that it has low child mortality rates, long life expectancy, environmental protection. You name it; they've got it. Well, Mr. Speaker, I need to also present the other side. When you look at Sweden, and you look at the income per capita – and you have to keep in mind that Sweden has been neutral in two wars and has not experienced the effect of those turmoils and chaos – the growth rate in Sweden was the lowest of all the OECD countries. That includes Italy and the United Kingdom. During that same period, the past 20 years of socialism in Sweden that we've had and that we can measure the high levels of taxation, the annual income for the average Swedish family and the portion of that income that is disposable amounts to some \$15,000 Canadian.

Now, at the same time, you look at what has happened in Canada: you have a disposable portion of income which is \$26,000. What a difference, Mr. Speaker. Further, Canadians have really enjoyed most of the same programs that Sweden has, but while they have a certain amount of spending power, we in Canada have \$11,000 more spending power than they have. And that's a significant difference when we're talking about poverty, because the money that an individual has in their pocket to spend, not just for basic necessities but for all things that are important to life – that's where the critical aspect comes.

On the government side of the House I believe we know that you can't just keep increasing funding levels. We are, Mr. Speaker, at 77 percent. If you do increase arbitrarily those levels, you're merely treating the symptoms of poverty and you're ignoring the root causes of that particular problem. We in government know that in order to break that cycle of poverty, you have to provide opportunities for individuals to take the necessary steps to become independent without that government assistance. You have to take steps to ensure that the provincial economy remains strong and diversified, that jobs are created, and that individuals who are capable of employment have the education and skills, the training, which will allow them to actively participate in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, that's an important aspect. It deals with our economy, and our economy and job creation and diversification are directly related to the quality of life we have through reduction and meeting the objective of eliminating poverty. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche has spoken in this House repeatedly about the desire of his constituents to get off welfare, to get off the social programs, to have jobs. They want to be independent; they want to have that self-esteem to actually be independent. I think that is an important aspect.

Mr. Speaker, the problem I perceive here is that on one hand we're talking about elimination of poverty, which this government is actively pursuing. The members on the Liberal benches are talking about the same objective. Their approach is completely, in my mind, redundant, because on one side they're talking about stopping all economic activity because of environmental concerns, and at the same time, they want to create jobs and eliminate poverty. It reminds me of the individual who has difficulty with chewing gum and walking in a straight line at the same time, because, Mr. Speaker, you cannot just stop the world in order to fix problems. You have to find solutions as we go on with the business of the day, as we carry on with the economic diversification, with other initiatives to create employment, to create a quality of life, to create that independence.

Mr. Speaker, the solution to this problem of poverty lies basically in developing some new programs and services, looking

at creative approaches, and utilizing the resources that are already in place. That is an important aspect. When you spend 77 percent of your annual budget in these particular programs, to me that appears to be an enormous amount. The approach to solving the problems of poverty would then become: how do we use that 77 percent in the most effective fashion in order to meet that particular objective that's been expressed and with which I agree? Spending more and more money on subsidies is not the answer.

Let me give you another example, Mr. Speaker. When we assist some of the Third World countries, we do not assist them by sending more and more money, because it does not solve the problems that exist there. The best solution is where we provide some education, some expertise, to show them how to be independent. There's a similarity here in the approach. It's not a situation of throwing money at the problem and hoping it will go away. I think that type of approach, of throwing money, is an old way of thinking, based on old attitudes, and is not effective.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak a little bit with respect to the day care support situation. I mentioned that earlier at the outset in my remarks, and I want to specifically address that because I'm personally involved in that situation. My wife and I utilize day care. Our daughter does go to day care. We as a family have made a conscious decision to do that. Because we have made that choice, we receive the allowance indirectly through the day care operation. Now, the combined income of my wife and I is such that I feel uncomfortable receiving a subsidy from the government that is targeted toward my child, and it shouldn't be there, Mr. Speaker. That situation is not correct, and I think it needs to be rectified. When the minister is speaking about changing and restructuring the program in order to make it fair and equitable, then I think the situation becomes somewhat more acceptable, because the restructuring involves not subsidizing those people that have higher incomes but reallocating those funds to those families that are in need. I think that is the main objective, and that's what government programs should be designed for.

At present we have various types of child care available in the province. These include some government regulated systems of licensed day care centres. We have approved and licensed day homes. We also have some informal child care options such as nannies, babysitting, and other private arrangements. We've got approximately 171,000 families with children under the age of six in Alberta, and the government supported day care operation, this system, is used by approximately 13 percent of those 171,000 families. The remaining 87 percent have chosen some other options in order to look after their child or children. Forty-two percent, which is about 72,000 families, have made the conscious decision where one parent stays at home, either the wife or the husband, and they care for their preschool age children. Another 45 percent, which is about 80,000 families, use other more informal day care arrangements. In both instances the federal government provides some relief through child tax credits and income deductions which are available to all those families.

I believe in 1978 the government introduced a provincewide day care program for preschool children, which was established by this Progressive Conservative government under the leadership of the former Premier, Peter Lougheed. That legislation dealt with some standards and policy guidelines which were especially designed to ensure the maximum quality care and services for children attending these facilities. Now, as part of that there was an operating allowance program, which com-

menced in 1980. It was set up in response to a growing demand in our province for that quality child care service. The primary purpose of that program was to encourage and assist day care operators in meeting the challenge that existed then. As a result of the introduction of that program and as a result of those initiatives, between the years of 1981 and 1989 the number of day care centres increased some 87 percent, from 353 to 660. In addition, over that same time period the number of licensed spaces increased by 100 percent, from 16,163 to some 32,455. Operating allowance funding increased from some 3.2 million in 1980-81 to an estimated 33.8 million in 1989-90. So successful was that particular program in developing additional child care spaces that the province actually developed a 20 percent day care vacancy rate.

In addition to that particular operating allowance program, we provide a child care subsidy program. It is another program, Mr. Speaker, that was initiated by our government in 1980. It is designed to assist the lower income families. It assists the lower income families . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Time flies when you're enjoying yourself, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to be able to rise and talk on Motion 202. I think this motion is very important, like the previous speaker said, because it does address an issue of poverty. I think it's very crucial that we recognize what a serious issue this is. The previous speaker stated in his opening remarks that he felt this is a serious issue and then went on to speak about all the wonderful things this government is doing and that, in fact, poverty is not really an issue in the province. So he denied that it was even an issue. I would agree that this government does spend a lot of money. Most of the money they spend, however, is on a lot of ineffective programs. A lot of their policies don't make sense, and a lot of money is wasted. I would encourage the member that just spoke to really take a hard look at where the money is being spent and how effective some of these programs are.

I know of children, Mr. Speaker, that are going to school hungry, and we've heard about that today. I know of single moms who cannot take their children to the doctor. They may not have the transportation to go, or they may in fact not want to take their children because they know they don't have the money to buy a prescription if the doctor gives them one. These are serious concerns. I know of children who are dropping out of school because they can't concentrate. They are ill more often than other children if they come from low-income families. They end up dropping out of school. For some of us in this Assembly thinking about some of these situations and some of these children and families is a very painful thing to do. I think others, however, simply deny it's happening and deny the real seriousness of the problem. But as a government we have a responsibility to look at and deal with the issue of poverty. And it certainly isn't an easy issue; it's a very complex one.

Mr. Speaker, it takes political will and personal conviction, I believe, to admit that there's a problem and then do something about it. I think we have to recognize that government does play a very major role in eliminating poverty in this province and we do need some concrete proposals and some action. The starting point is that we have to start believing in people, believing that most people are good people, and we have to quit blaming. When we take a look at, for example, a couple with

children who are working for minimum wage in this province and having to go to the food bank because they can't make ends meet, how can we blame them for their situation? We have to quit blaming the single mom who happens to be on social assistance who can perhaps get a job for only \$4.50 an hour or cannot find quality child care and therefore is forced to stay at home. We have to quit blaming her for her situation. We have to quit blaming people for not knowing how to budget their money when in fact we know the amount they're receiving on social assistance, for example, in no way pays for basic needs like food, clothing, and decent housing.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

So I think the first step, Mr. Speaker, is to be positive and for this government to quit blaming people who are living in low-income situations. I feel strongly that the government does have a responsibility to take some action and that they should be supporting some of the initiatives that have been brought forth by various organizations right here in this province.

AN HON. MEMBER: Like the NDs.

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, I will agree with the member to my right, that we do have some very good ideas in the New Democrat Party as well.

This motion lists some very good initiatives. Some of them we've heard before, and of course many we would support in the Official Opposition. Something that is missing here, though, when we talk about a wide range of different programs is that we must talk about a guaranteed annual income that ensures that no one lives below the poverty line, because when we talk about various programs, Mr. Speaker, there's always someone who is not going to fit into one program or another and will be left out. So I think we really need to talk about a guaranteed annual income.

It really infuriates me when our Minister of Family and Social Services, the minister of compassion in this House, brags about the assured income for the severely handicapped program, which he did the other day in the House, because we know that people living on the income from the AISH program are in fact living way below the poverty line. It's nothing to brag about. They haven't had an increase since 1986, which is over four years. These are the kinds of things we have to take a serious look at. So again, I'd like to stress the whole notion of a guaranteed annual income, because it would ensure that nobody would fall below the poverty line.

Mr. Speaker, something that came to my attention today was some information from the Canadian Labour Congress. Something they state here is:

One-hundred and fifty-one thousand children in Canada use food banks every month. There are three times the number of food banks in Toronto as there are McDonald's restaurants.

Canada already has one of the highest proportions in the industrial world of its people living below the poverty line and of children of single parent families living in poverty.

Only the United States has a worse record than we do here in Canada. Certainly this has implications for Alberta. The situation is in fact quite serious in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we know there are devastating effects on children who grow up in poverty. The Child Poverty Action group right here in Edmonton is an organization that gets together and is coming up with some very good initiatives. They approached the government, three departments apparently, with



some recommendations they had come up with. They heard back from only one department. They didn't hear from the others. So it's very clear, Mr. Speaker, that the government is not listening.

I think it's very distressing that again in the throne speech we had no mention of poverty, none at all. However, this government did talk about getting people to become more independent. There was no information other than that in the throne speech, so we have to use our imaginations to really figure out what in fact they're saying there. If we look at their track record, I think we have reason to be concerned. The fact that the government *sees* fit to continually give money to their business friends and yet there's no mention of poverty or children living in poverty in the throne speech *is* very serious. There seems to be no vision or no action plan, nothing of that sort, to deal with this issue. I think it's disgraceful in a province like this, where we have men, women, and children not even getting their basic needs met, something most of us take for granted. I feel that a government that does not work toward a healthy future for all of us does not deserve to be a government. We need to take a look at the thousands and thousands of children in Alberta who are living below the poverty line and are depending on food banks to get their nutritional requirements. This is totally unacceptable.

Again, we know the devastating effects that living in low-income families has on children. We know the human, social, and economic costs, and they are just tremendous. How does this government respond? Well, this is a good example, something that I was involved in recently. This *is* one example – and I think it's a very good example – to illustrate how they respond. We do know that children from poor families fare badly in school. This is an economic issue as well as a social and human issue. We know that a disproportionate number of dropouts come from low-income families. Certainly there are other reasons why children drop out, but this is certainly a factor. There's one program in the Edmonton region, Mr. Speaker, that reintegrates back into the regular school system junior and senior high school students who have dropped out of school. They have a 70 percent success rate of getting these kids back into school. Yet what does this government do? It cuts their funding. So they have to refuse to take in kids, they have waiting lists, et cetera. What does the government do? Cuts their funding when there's a clear need for these kinds of programs. I think it's shameful, Mr. Speaker, but it's not surprising. I'm sure many of us in this Assembly could list a number of negative actions the government has taken that don't help the situation at all.

It's very clear that Conservative governments, whether at the federal level or the provincial level, are continually attacking low- and middle-income families and individuals. I think it's worth taking a look at what's happening at the federal level. I know we look forward to seeing what's going to happen at the provincial level on Thursday night when we get the budget here, but I think we have to take a look at what's happening at the federal level, because it does affect Alberta. We see a federal Conservative government that ended the universality of family allowance and pensions. In this last federal budget they cut \$165 million from social housing programs. The federal government cut money and funding for women's centres. We know many women live in poverty and many women are single parents who live *in* poverty. There was less money for child care. A hundred and ninety-five million dollars was cut from postsecondary education, which will clearly affect Alberta. There

was money for health and welfare grants to groups promoting health and social services, and this was cut by over \$12 million. Mr. Wilson had no problem in putting Canadians out of work with this budget. As a matter of fact, he even stated that it's a necessary price we have to pay. Certainly jobs here in Alberta will be lost, Mr. Speaker, and this will have devastating effects on many people in this province. So I have a problem with the Conservatives at the federal level, what they're doing here, and I have a problem with the lack of action at the provincial level when it comes to initiatives.

I guess one of the problems I do have as well is that despite the unacceptable and devastating effects the federal budget will have on ordinary low- and middle-income families – Canadians and, more specifically, Albertans – the leader of the Liberal Party did express support for this federal budget. His comments were that his overall assessment of the budget was a positive one. So I'm concerned with this motion – not specifically with the initiatives in the motion; I think they're very good ones, and I wholeheartedly support them. Simply, the concern comes from the fact that the motion is being sponsored by a member of the Liberal Party whose leader supports a federal budget that definitely affects Albertans. I have a bit of concern with that. Not only does the member need to convince the government that poverty is a real issue; she also needs to convince her leader. I wish her all the best in doing that.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say that I, too, have a motion on the Order Paper addressing the issue of poverty, and I look forward to making additional comments when that motion *is* debated in the Assembly. Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to agree with my colleague the hon. Member for Clover Bar. This motion is wide-ranging, perhaps too wide-ranging, so that it's not really possible to respond to each and every point raised in it to do it due justice.

This debate is really not about who cares about the poor. Indeed, it's not about who cares about the issue of poverty. Because surely, Mr. Speaker, all hon. members in this Assembly care about the issue. What we're really talking about today is strategies of how to address the problems associated with poverty.

Now, I must disagree with the inference that the elimination of poverty *is* not an objective of this government. It certainly is one of our objectives. We're working hard to eliminate poverty by fostering an economic environment in which all Albertans can fully participate. That is a strategy. We're providing social programs which meet the needs of those Albertans who are presently disabled, disadvantaged, or underemployed. This government will provide information, assistance, and encouragement to its citizens, but it is the efforts, ideas, and abilities of Albertans that will make this economy vibrant. We can say without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, that the greatest resource of this province is indeed its people. This government has responded and will continue to respond to the needs of the whole province and the people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has indicated that this government should improve programs for training and retraining. I'd like to bring some information to her attention and, indeed, to all hon. members' attention. This province has some of the finest job-training and retraining

programs in Canada. I would say it would be difficult indeed to produce and introduce programs that are more creative and progressive than the programs presently offered in our province. The mandate of the government of Alberta has always been to keep Albertans at work and on the job and employed in a vibrant economy. This government has managed to accomplish this goal by offering innovative services such as employment creation and training programs as well as career information and counseling services. It has been estimated that in the 1989-90 fiscal year, over 650,000 Albertans will take advantage of these services offered by the Department of Career Development and Employment. Of these, 40,281 will use the province's training programs, over 19,000 will use the province's employment programs, and over 613,000 will use the province's information and counseling services.

Mr. Speaker, these programs have been particularly effective, as illustrated by some recent statistics released by the Minister of Career Development and Employment. The statistics show that in the month of February 31,000 more Albertans were working than in February of 1989. I repeat, 31,000 more were working than in the month a year ago. These statistics also showed that full-time employment had reached an all-time high in this February of 1990. On a year-to-year basis, it increased 32,000 from February '89 to February 1990. Alberta indeed leads all the provinces in this great country in employment growth. This is the most effective way to eliminate poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about job creation. The mix of programs and services offered by this government is dictated by the demands of Alberta's labour market, and therefore it changes in response to the economic conditions that change from time to time. During times of recession, such as the one that followed the oil price crash of 1986, the province concentrated on short-term programs designed to create new employment opportunities for unemployed Albertans. These programs consisted of wage subsidies and community and business development projects which helped to create new jobs. Some examples of these programs are the Alberta business and community development program, the priority employment program, and the summer temporary employment program. In total the province offers nine employment programs which will employ over 13,700 people in the fiscal year 1989-90.

Mr. Speaker, now that Alberta's economy has begun to grow and to diversify into new and exciting business sectors, this government's emphasis has shifted from job-creation programs to job-training programs. In a strong economy like Alberta's, it makes better sense to devote more dollars to training and counseling, since many Albertans that are without jobs are suffering from a lack of appropriate skills rather than a lack of jobs due to the downturn in the employment cycle. It is generally known that in this province there are many jobs that need to be filled. Indeed, in the period from December '86 to December 1989 this government's policies were responsible for the creation of over 90,000 jobs in this province. Over that same period the unemployment rate in the province dropped from 10.1 percent to 7 percent. Government training programs provide financial incentives to private-sector employers for training and skill development. These programs also serve to upgrade the quality of Alberta's work force and to ensure that Albertans have the skills required by our expanding economy.

We have in the motion a mention of increasing the delivery of family support programs through school nutrition and headstart programs. I just want to say a few words about those: As hon. members know from my maiden speech delivered some time

ago, I was a teacher and, indeed, a principal in a number of schools in the southwestern part of Alberta. While a principal in several of the schools I had the honour to serve in, I made arrangements for nutrition programs, particularly nutritious snack programs but also a hot meal program. The costs in school employment time were great, but we did endeavour on a short-term basis to work on those kinds of programming. I want to bring up this matter in a slightly different way. It seems that in society whenever we have a problem, whenever a problem is perceived, the suggestion arises: have the schools work on it. Well, I guess my problem with that is that the schools can't do everything and we need to set some priorities. It may be that in this debate that is of some benefit, because it brings to the fore the addition of one more responsibility on the backs of our schools. I think we need to look at that whole issue of putting everything onto the schools, as worthy as the suggestion might be.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have some concern for people who talk about economic strategy and then cheer with delight when employment projects are stopped or discontinued in this province. They seem unable to make the connection between employment and development and how they may resolve the issues of poverty. Poverty, by the way, is not just a financial figure, a line; it takes many forms. I would suggest that when a person is out of work, can't get a job, they're suffering from several kinds of poverty, one of which, of course, is a financial thing. Even, however, if their basic needs are covered by unemployment insurance or social assistance, that person who wants to work feels the poorer because they haven't got a job. So the strategy in this province is to provide jobs and eliminate poverty in that way, poverty not only financial but the poverty of spirit, for people who want to work.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also talk a little bit about recent job-training initiatives. The training programs this province offers cater to many different groups within our society. There are programs that are offered to natives, such as the Opportunity Corps; there are programs for the disabled, such as the vocational rehabilitation for disabled persons program; and there are numerous other programs that cover groups such as farmers, women, and recent postsecondary graduates to name a few. This government is committed to responding to the needs of its citizens, and with that in mind we've recently implemented several new and innovative job training programs.

One of these new programs is designed specifically for the province's growing forestry sector. The forestry training program provides funding for employers to offset the cost of training a new employee. The government of Alberta has used this program to channel almost \$10 million into the training of approximately 2,100 Albertans to a level appropriate for employment in the forestry area. It's important that we plan and prepare for the increased demand for workers in the forestry industry in the last part of this century and the 21st century to come. New, specialized jobs will be created in occupations ranging from management to trades to reforestation and site preparation. It is therefore essential that Alberta have sufficient skilled human resources to meet these various needs of this growing industry.

This government has also recently initiated a campaign to increase the overall awareness and image of trade occupations in the province of Alberta. There are over 50 certified trades in this province, many of which are experiencing shortages in skilled tradespeople, partly a reflection of the booming economy. The construction industry, for example, is having trouble finding

certain skilled professionals to keep up with the current housing boom. Job advertisements, for instance, for framers have been undersubscribed, and the construction industry has had to bring in skilled framers from nearby Saskatchewan to meet the demands of Alberta's growing economy. Presently the Department of Career Development and Employment is acting as a liaison with industry, trade institutions, and other government departments in an effort to alleviate this skill shortage. All together, Mr. Speaker, there are over 20 programs currently operating in this province that deal specifically with employment creation, training, and retraining. This government does an admirable job of delivering programs to those people in this province who need upgrading in their employment skills. This is also an important way to eliminate poverty.

Mr. Speaker, there are many roads to Damascus, and there are other roads to lessen poverty. In this spirit I've entered this debate this afternoon.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first comment I want to make is a reference to a previous comment made about our leader supporting the federal budget. I think he made it very, very clear that he did not in fact support the federal budget. He didn't support the reduction of transfer payments. Rather, he expressed delight that finally one government at least realized that there is a need for a plan when you tackle – he was referring specifically to the deficit, and he was simply trying to illustrate that each government, including this government, has to have a plan in place and that plan has to show how over a period of time the deficit is going to be tackled and how financial resources are to be properly managed. That's the only part of the budget he expressed any confidence in at all.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I sit and listen to some of the other comments being made this afternoon, I kind of sit back and think to myself: "You know, this has got to be the greatest government in the world. We're all a happy lot here. It's just love and peace, and we're all well fed and there are streets, of gold." It's not being recognized that there are people that are hungry out there, people that are starving. There are people that are homeless. There are food banks out there. We're not talking in terms of three-car families here, or we're not talking in terms of someone that may have a combined income of a hundred thousand dollars and feeling that there's no need for day care subsidies. We're talking about a motion that deals with the elimination of poverty. Let's remember what poverty is. Poverty is children running around without shoes, children running around without decent clothes, children with bellies that are empty because there simply are not enough dollars in the home to provide the food, the groceries, that should be provided.

We're talking about families. You go down to the inner city, spend a bit of time in Boyle Street and some of those areas and look at those little suites where you have families living in a two-bedroom place where they still pull a string from the ceiling to turn on a light bulb, where three or four families may share a bathroom, where people may only have one meal a day, in many cases that one meal being brought in by Meals on Wheels. We're talking here about people who don't have homes. We're talking about people who line up to get extra groceries from the food bank. I think we have to lay that framework down when we talk in terms of this motion.

We're not talking in terms of making things a bit easier for the middle class or for those that are in the middle to high income. The whole intent of the motion is to address poverty. It's fine to talk about some of the programs that may be working reasonably well or that look fine on paper, but look at the assured income for the severely handicapped, for example. It's been at a level of a little over \$700 a month – \$720 – for, I believe, something like the last eight years now with no increase, no factor to recognize that the price of a loaf of bread goes up, rents are going up, other costs go up. That's poverty. Nobody should be expected to live on an income of \$720 a month.

We're talking in terms of people on social assistance who in some cases receive an allowance of a little over \$500 a month. That has to cover rent, that has to cover groceries, and that has to cover other expenditures. Some of you may not realize what people on social assistance have to live with. I had a situation, Mr. Speaker, and I use this as a demonstration, of the department telling a girl, a recipient of social assistance, that she's not entitled to have a TV even though this TV cost her \$300 and it didn't cost the department any extra dollars. She was given a voucher for \$469 to buy furniture for her suite. Because of the way she shopped, she got the essentials as defined by Social Services and there was \$200 left. The retail store involved allowed her to buy the TV. She took \$100 that she had saved up over a period of time for an emergency and used that to get the TV. The department now tells her: "No. You're on social assistance. You're not entitled to a TV." This girl, by the way, doesn't even have a phone. I think that is being corrected, but I'm not sure a phone is even classified as an essential service for people on social assistance – just a basic thing that we all take for granted. In my home I've got three phones and about four extensions, and I bet in comparison to a lot of others here that's a small number.

Now, this girl I'm referring to has difficulty in getting an educational requirement so she can go out there and compete. She's struggling through an Alberta vocational training program. She's trying to be productive. Her only recreation now is to go home and, after she does her studies, watch the news on TV and some other programs. The department is saying: "No. That's too much for you. That's luxury. You've got to give that TV back." Mr. Speaker, the department ruled today. They told me that she's got to give that TV back. Now, that's what I'm talking about when I talk in terms of poverty. We have a government that still classifies a \$300 TV as a luxury item for a person who can't afford any other form of recreation or leisure activity, who is existing on an income of a little over \$500 a month while she struggles to get retrained through the Alberta vocational training program.

We're talking in terms of families out there, Mr. Speaker. Some government programs are so restrictive. Because they don't have resources to go to other places for dollars, they are actually being advised by social workers: "Well, a way to get around this is you get a legal separation. Because of a legal separation you can then access additional programs, and maybe then the two of you can share the same accommodation and that way you might have an income coming in that at least allows you to exist." Now, that's not what I call Social Services family unity or encouraging families to stay together.

We talk in terms of low-cost housing. If you look at places like San Francisco, for example, there's an architect there by the name of Macdonald that has approached, tried to fight the problem of poverty in the United States. We should learn by some of the things he's done: developed housing that can be

obtained or built, including the lot, for \$34,000 a year in a market that is fairly similar to ours but by using initiatives, by being creative, and by recognizing that there is a need to shelter the homeless.

We talk in terms of a return to the rental tax credit. I'm optimistic that's one program that maybe the government is going to recognize has to be reimplemented. I can understand that at the time it was taken away, rents seemed to be under control, but now they're not, Mr. Speaker. We're getting more and more reports. In Calgary very recently tenants of a housing project have been notified that they are receiving a 45 percent increase, but in the course of the next 12 months their rents will go up from \$365 a month to \$760 a month – in the course of a year. The landlord's response is, "Well, I'm trying to make it easy for them by phasing in these increases rather than do it all at once." So 12 months from now the rents have basically doubled. That's why there's a need for the renter's tax credit, to offset those additional costs so that at the same time the stimulation of additional rental units takes place.

We look at the minimum wage. If one were to look at stats, and stats have been referred to quite often today, the minimum wage in terms of increases, that happen on a very irregular basis – match what's happened in the private sector, match what's happened with the income levels or increases of other persons; the minimum wage increases have not kept par. To exist on the minimum wage you are well, well below the poverty lines.

We talk in terms of pay equity. Pay equity I think is a given, or it should be a given. Why should any member of society receive a lesser wage for doing the same job whether that person is a man or a woman? If that person is doing the same job, there shouldn't be any question about it. We know that pay equity has not been achieved. We know it hasn't been addressed. It hasn't been addressed within the public service let alone the private sector.

The motion also addresses a couple of other things. It talks in terms of part-time workers. More and more, as this government in the past has failed to attempt to deal with the question of the operational hours of retail shopping centres, we now see shopping going on in some cases till midnight, we see stores open seven days a week, which has started to encourage part-time workers. Now more and more of those retailers are relying on part-time workers, and they're relying on part-time workers because it, of course, reduces the cost. It reduces the cost in the form that the same types of benefits don't have to be paid, the same employment security measures don't have to be assured. I can look at a number of the retailers in this city that have virtually transferred their staff from a full-time basis to a part-time basis over a period of time. A lot of these people are working maybe three or four afternoons a week, three or four evenings a week, whatever the case may be, maybe 20 hours a week. But as far as employment statistics are concerned, Mr. Speaker, one of those persons working 20, 15 hours a week shows up as a person employed. So before these figures about the employment rate being so great and so many people out there are now working, let's look at what they're working at and let's look at what they're receiving in exchange for attempting to be productive in society. A lot of these part-time workers don't have any other options, because one is dreaming if you think you can go out there and just readily find a job these days. There is an unemployment factor there. It has been there for a number of years, and it appears it's going to be with us for a period of time yet.

Mr. Speaker, the motion is an attempt on the part of our

caucus to focus in and address the issue of poverty. Hopefully there are steps here that government members can look at and say that all of us together want to eliminate poverty in Alberta. It's nothing to be proud of, but before we can do that we of course have to recognize that there is poverty out there, and until that recognition is there, we're not going to deal with the problem that is there.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Assembly support this very, very important motion.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Three Hills.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do hope that my colleague who has also risen will have an opportunity to speak if I make my remarks brief.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing forward this motion, because I think it is too seldom that we have an opportunity to look social concerns in the face and speak frankly about what we see and try to share our ideas about what we might do to make things better in society for those people who have been less fortunate than ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I do have some concerns with this list that has been presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, because what I hear the hon. member saying is that the only definition of poverty that is important for this Legislature to note is one that has to do with financial means. I guess I take some exception to one statement she made where she talked about: with appropriate financial resources you have credibility. Can you imagine that the human person in our society isn't credible if they happen to be without money? I mean, that is about the most incredible thing I've heard in this Legislature for a long time. I know the hon. member believes this to be so because all of our discussion centring around poverty is financial. Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that we have other poverty in our society. It is poverty of a lack of thought and spirit that is important to address. When I hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud say that somehow it is as if people are less than human because their light switch happens to be a pull cord, I would say to the hon. member: I stand before you; I feel as if I have great dignity and worth as a human being, and I have some pull cords in my house. I happen to know that there are other people in my constituency with pull cords, and, in fact, many families share a bathroom.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

I guess I say to myself as I have looked at the worth and dignity of the individuals in the Three Hills constituency, those who for a period of time, often much longer than they would have liked, are without financial resources, that at no time have I seen evidence of poverty, not the real poverty that to me is the one that is so debilitating; that is, that you lack dignity and people look at you as if you lack dignity and especially if that dignity is predicated on financial resources. Mr. Speaker, there are so many people in rural Alberta in particular who do without many, many things in order to build a life for themselves and their families. What they do is . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please, in the House.

MRS. OSTERMAN: . . . deprive themselves of many of the so-called worldly goods, all the while involving themselves and their

families in the pursuit of very admirable and large goals. That gives them a sense of participation and dignity you will not see when you are talking constantly about handouts instead of hand ups.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we can't just advocate money, although in extreme circumstances, obviously, there has to be financial support. I think the challenge is to get at the cause. Because what has happened in our society over the past 30 years since we have seen an enormous amount of government's resources devoted to the people who we now have decided have to have this assistance . . . Have we taken away their dignity so they now have to lean on us? Have we presented a crutch that's taken away from them their ability to participate, partially because for some reason or other we set ourselves up in a judicial position of saying, "We make a judgment that you are now a lesser person because you don't have the same financial resources that we believe you ought to have"? That is one of the great sins in our society today, I think: the kind of judgments we make of other people. I obviously don't think that's appropriate.

It's interesting that so many members would believe that they can be socially responsible with other people's money. Mr. Speaker, I submit that to be socially responsible, we have to act as individuals in terms of how we treat our fellow man and how we dig into our own pocketbook, because the continual reallocation of resources has not cured – in fact, in some ways it appears with the new studies that are coming out to have actually increased the problem of social irresponsibility. I mean, it seems to be that somebody who isn't supporting their family, who abuses their children – and goodness knows what else happens out there – we mustn't say anything about that person because this is denigrating them. They used to be bums. Thirty years ago, 40 years ago they were bums. Society didn't accept that kind of behaviour. In our communities we said: "This is not acceptable behaviour. We expect you to be responsible." Have we done ourselves or them a favour in presenting a crutch?

Mr. Speaker, I think all of us demonstrate our own needs when we want people to be dependent on us. There are more and more people, especially the mentally handicapped and the physically challenged, who are coming forward and saying: "Don't do that to us. Look at what you're doing to our people when you make them dependent on government programs." They do have dignity and worth, and they want to be able to prove it. I think that is very important.

There were a number of other things I wanted to say, but I will leave with a verse, Mr. Speaker, if I may read what are the lines from a song that was written by a group of women I came to know in the Abbotsfield area, an incredible housing complex put together by the city of Edmonton with thousands of families living in a financially stressed condition. At the time I met with these families, when I was Minister of Social Services, I never heard one request for more money. It was their sense that people found worth in them that was absolutely primary. When I took my leave from Social Services and there was a farewell, they sang a song that they thought was particularly important

for them to express. This group is called CANDORA. The first part is "can do," and the RA has other significance. Mr. Speaker, these are very special women, women with worth, women with dignity, and I'll tell you, they have very little money, none to spare. But here is their song. It's to the tune of *This Land is Your Land*.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're not going to sing it, are you?

MRS. OSTERMAN: I will read it and spare you all my singing.

This land is your land,  
This land is my land,  
A land of freedom and opportunity,  
But it is my prison for a life in poverty,  
This land was made for you and me.  
As I was walking along life's highway,  
I made decisions that went against me.  
So now I struggle to meet life's basics,  
But this land was made for you and me.  
So if you could help me along life's highway  
For just a while till I can smile  
And get my family and life together, then  
This [land] is good for you and me.  
Our lives are different, on different pathways,  
But if you help me to struggle upward,  
I'll show others that are in trouble  
That this land is good for you and me.  
If you could help me climb this here mountain,  
Without me begging or feeling less human,  
And I do thank you for how you've helped me,  
In this land that's made for you and me.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Speaker, in the one minute left to me, I would like to address the remarks just made in regard to dignity. Real poverty often denies a real participation in society and the ability to make real choices. People that can participate and make real choices have their full human dignity, but people who are denied full participation and the capacity to make choices and alternatives to choose from, they are denied human dignity. Poverty denies that dignity because it denies choice and it denies participation.

I beg leave to adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the motion, those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, it is the intent of the government that the Assembly sit tonight. The business of this evening will be continuation of debate of Her Honour's throne speech delivered to this House.

[The House recessed at 5:30 p.m.]

