

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 4, 1990 2:30 p.m.**

Date: 90/04/04

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I wish to file a copy of a petition signed by some 350 Albertans. It's a formal protest and objection to the proposed policy to open various areas of hunting to outfitters and guides and place present Alberta hunters on a draw system.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Assembly copies of the following reports: the annual report for the Department of Economic Development and Trade, '88-89; the annual report of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, '88-89; the annual report of the Alberta Opportunity Company for the year ended March 31, 1989, which was previously circulated to all members.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also table with you the response to Question 215.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I wish to file four copies each of two letters written by the Premier to two different Albertans pledging that the government would never support an outfitting policy that discriminates against small business.

MR. ORMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the communiqué from the energy ministers' conference in Kananaskis this past Monday.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. ORMAN: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly a group of students from the Father Scollen elementary/junior high school in the constituency of Calgary-Montrose. They are joined by teachers Enzo Ribecco, Tina Brandelli, and Tony Filippetto, and parents Anne Conte, Bruce Hilder, and Judy Zatzek. The students went through my office today, presented me a pin, which I'm proud to wear, and gave me a picture of the time I opened the school last year. I'd ask them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly today on behalf of my friend and colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona 20 students whom I had the pleasure of meeting earlier today. They're from the Strathearn elementary school, accompanied by teacher Henry Unrau and teacher aide Julie Sabo. They're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MRS. B. LAING: I'd like to introduce to the House, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague Mr. Mike Cardinal, some representatives of the Alberta Vocational Centre at Lac La Biche. Eighteen are in the group. They're in the public gallery. I'd like to also introduce the teacher, P. Hawthorn, and Albert Happner, the bus driver. Let's please accord them a warm welcome.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce Mr. Norman Stienwand, who is the president of the Alliance of Independent Alberta Guides and Outfitters, and also Dianne and Peter Egge, who have been active up to now as guides and outfitters. They're here to help secure Albertans' access to their own wildlife resource. They're in the public gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, please.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Gainers Assistance

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are rightly furious to have learned that Peter Pocklington has now wondered out loud why it is that this government ever decided to get mixed up with him. [interjections] That's right. In a TV interview televised last night, I believe he used the phrase "damned poor risk." He might well have added "damned poor government" under the circumstances. The banks wouldn't touch this man's deal with a barge pole. I'd like to ask the Premier this: what financial wizard or genius in his government cooked up this secret deal with Peter Pocklington and put the Alberta taxpayers on the hook?

MR. SPEAKER: Just a moment. The onus of responsibility is on the person asking the question and the person making the answer with respect to the sub judice rules, so be very, very careful.

MS BARRETT: It's not . . .

MR. SPEAKER: This is not an argument, hon. member.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your warning, because I was going to make the same point. There will be a lot of opportunity for this debate to flow in the court system, as we have now initiated at least three actions against the former shareholder of the company and more actions will be forthcoming.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen the tape of that interview, but I can say that it seemed to me that the former owner, Mr. Pocklington, was on both sides of the issue, saying that the company had some financial stress but at the same time giving an asset estimate far above that which we expected.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the first place, the Provincial Treasurer knows he can't hide behind the sub judice rule. The issue isn't in court, and if he doesn't know *Beauchesne* by now, maybe he . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. I have seven statements of claim here.

MS BARRETT: It's not at trial. The issue isn't at trial, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Excuse me. Sub judice convention.

MS BARRETT: Secondly, Mr. Speaker, if the Provincial Treasurer's research is so poor, I'd like to offer him a copy of the tape that was recorded last night. Okay?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Premier doesn't want to answer the question. I'll put it to him, and maybe he can decide who's responsible here. This guy walked away from a \$373 million debt at his own trust company a few years back. Obviously, Peter Puck, his poor old friend, can't be trusted. Now, if the Premier is saying that these guys in his cabinet are such financial wizards, then why did they let Peter Pocklington bilk the taxpayers on a deal that the banks wouldn't get near?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, the taxpayers have not been bilked. That's an absolutely false statement. There's no evidence to confirm that whatsoever. I can assure you that over the course of the next 24 hours I'll have a look at the tape. I'm busy keeping government operations going as opposed to dealing with these kinds of issues. But I think there is a question of fact, Mr. Speaker, and I think even as I hear the reported comments from the former owner, it certainly differs from the information we have as to what are the facts. Those facts will be fully debated when the court process continues.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, sometime in the subsequent century. Peter Pocklington has acknowledged that it was a "damned poor risk." The facts are clear even if the Provincial Treasurer hasn't bothered to look them up yet. If the Treasurer and the Premier are so certain that they're on the side of the angels on this issue, why is it that they won't release the master agreement that they signed with their good old friend Peter Puck, and why don't they tell us to what extent this guy was paying himself management fees at the same time?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I've been advised by our solicitors that the master agreement will be made public as soon as the court process concludes, and that is the direction I must accept. I mean, if you ask lawyers to represent you, you have to accept their advice, and I'm doing just that.

Mr. Speaker, I must say, as we have argued in this House going back some time, that the decision to assist in the Gainers matter is, in fact, one which allows the agricultural sector to diversify, to continue that very important part of the hog industry here in this province, which Canada-wide is going through extreme difficulties right now. I know that the opposition, including the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, has no concern for the jobs at the Gainers plant. We have a far different view of that, a far different view. We're concerned about jobs, we're concerned about continuing the diversification, and we know that that industry will rebound. The proof of the

pudding will be when this company is finally put back in the private sector as a profitable entity.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question of the opposition.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to designate the second question to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, please.

Goods and Services Tax

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer made a statement before an audience in Lethbridge last week. As incredible as it may sound, the Provincial Treasurer said that he believes Michael Wilson will keep the manufacturers sales tax at the same time as he brings in the goods and services tax. Until now every document Mr. Wilson has tabled and every speech he's given has stated that the manufacturers sales tax will go, to be replaced by the GST. Now, one tax is bad enough. To give us both of them is quite difficult to believe. I'd like to ask the Provincial Treasurer: is he serious when he suggests that Canada is going to be double-crossed by Michael Wilson and get two terrible taxes not just one?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I've got a variety of other speeches I'd be glad to give to the member if he wants to do his research in that fashion. I know it would be helpful, because I've never seen such distortion in my life. What we have said continually, Mr. Speaker, is that it's likely that the manufacturers sales tax, which is now imposed on manufactured items, will not fully pass through to the consumer. Therefore, the position taken by Mr. Wilson — that is, that the 7 percent goods and services tax will be the only additional tax paid — in our view is not right. In our analysis, including analysis which is back-stopped by our paper of November 1989, we make a modest assumption that 70 percent of the MST will flow through, 30 percent will stay with the manufacturers, because they will take it as additional profits. Certainly because no one understands how much the MST is, in fact they can capture that extra profit because of their market position. That's what we said, Mr. Speaker. Most economists agree with that, and I'm glad I've had an opportunity to provide an explanation to the member.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer said that he expected that Michael Wilson would leave the manufacturers tax in place. I couldn't think how that could be any clearer. So I'd like to ask the Provincial Treasurer if he would explain to the people of Canada, if this tax is going to be kept in place: why will Mr. Wilson keep this tax in place and give us two terrible Tory sales taxes instead of just the goods and services tax? Why are we going to have the two of them instead of just the one?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I hate to see the member so exercised over a fairly simple issue; that is, that Mr. Wilson will not keep the MST. It will be kept by the manufacturer. Mr. Wilson has already imposed part of the goods and services tax by increasing the MST, as he did in the last budget, about 1 and a half percent to 13 and a half percent. That's phase 1 of his GST implementation. Mr. Wilson is not going to keep the MST, but he has got some of the GST already in the form of higher MST. There it is, Mr. Speaker, a very simple explanation, and I don't think we need to get the kind of distortion that we're seeing from the member today.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, all we're getting out of this minister is talk, and it's about time we finally get action. The time for action is long since past. Given that the GST Bill is fast approaching third reading, will the Treasurer finally reveal to the Legislature what steps he's going to take to mount an effective anti-GST campaign before it's too late and we get this terrible tax for Alberta?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as Robbie Robertson said, "Hey, take a picture of this."

First of all, as I have told the House before, the Premier during the First Ministers' Conference managed to bind the provinces together. That was a very important step in opposition to the federal imposition of that tax. That was pivotal to the way in which the provinces' position emerged. Subsequent to that, the finance ministers had a chance to consider, to understand fully the impact of this tax, the centralizing nature of this tax, the confiscation of the dollars that would normally be theirs, therefore cutting into their jurisdiction in terms of programs such as education. That became fully understood by the provinces over the course of the Alberta leadership on this issue.

As well, the November 1989 paper, well recognized as one of the best papers in this area of GST, clearly spelling out the opposition to this GST by the province of Alberta, became a theme paper for all other governments and, in fact, as recently as yesterday, with our meeting with the Pro-Canada group, was recognized as an exemplary example of how this issue can be taken on. Moreover, as I like to point out, the final measurement as to how communication has taken place is, in fact, that 76 to 80 percent of the population of Alberta is strongly opposed to the whole question of GST. Therefore . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Thank you very much.
Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. DECORE: Who's Robbie Robertson, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: That's the first question. Now your supplementary. [interjections]

MR. DECORE: I'm making fun of your research staff, Mr. Treasurer.

MR. JOHNSTON: He wrote a famous song, Take the Blues Train.

MR. DECORE: Oh, that Robbie Robertson.
Mr. Speaker, my questions [inaudible],

MR. SPEAKER: There's no sound system at the moment because you haven't been recognized, hon. member.

Now, with the first question, please, rather succinctly now that you've used up the first two sentences.

Renters Assistance

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, responsible for housing. Amongst the many thousands of renters in our province a great proportion of those are either at the poverty line or below the poverty line. People have been hurt badly in the last few months because of rent increases, so badly that moneys which were allocated for food are now being reallocated towards shelter. The minister of

housing and the Premier have expressed some sympathy to give assistance to renters in the course of this spring session. My first question is this: given that the bureaucracy has now delivered a paper to the minister and given that that paper says that little moneys are available to give assistance and given the fact that we're now debating estimates in this very Assembly, can the minister confirm today that assistance will be given to renters in the province of Alberta?

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I appreciate the concern and the question from the hon. leader of the Liberal Party. During the last week I've assigned a special person to look at what is happening with rental rates and vacancy rates in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary specifically but also in some of the rural areas. We have surveyed in that period of time some 40,000 rental units on a first-hand observation basis and have looked at what has happened in that whole arena. The findings are as follows. First of all, on average rental rates have increased about 10 percent. There are a number at 6 percent. The second thing we've found is that the traffic through these rental units, in terms of people going out to rent apartments – one bedroom, two bedroom, three bedroom – as such has decreased significantly, up to 50 percent in different locations. The third thing we've noted is that the number of rental units that are being advertised, February versus the end of March, has increased significantly. For example, one of the papers we used as a piece of information had one page of advertisements in February, last week five pages, which indicated that there was a lot more opportunity for rental units.

The fourth thing we noted, and I think this relates directly to the hon. member's question, is with regards to the movement that's going on. There is a movement from the higher rent type accommodation down to the lower rent area, which is causing a pressure on the lower rent units, which is creating competition for the lower income people and certainly the people on social assistance. I would have to say to the hon. member that we are concerned about that. The minister of social services and I have had discussions with regards to that, and we'd like to look at the implications of that scenario at the present time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister. Save some for a supplementary, please. Let's go.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, \$40 million was allocated to first-time homeowners in last year's budget, \$30 million this year. Can the minister assure Albertans that at least that assistance will be given to renters in this budget year?

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, one of the foresights that the government had was with regards to assisting people in being able to live in their own home for the first time. We have had a significant number – I believe I quoted earlier in the Legislature as to about 18,000 families – that now have their first home because of that program. Secondly, we have noted that the industry as such will put another 17,000 units on the market this year, which will move a number of people out of rental units. The government is doing everything it can to assist people in meeting their shelter accommodation and will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my last question is to the Premier. Given the fact that the Premier did undertake to consider assistance to renters and inasmuch as we're well into

government estimates, will the Premier commit to at least levels of assistance to renters which equate to those that are now given to first-time homeowners?

MR. GETTY: No, I won't make that commitment, Mr. Speaker, but I do emphasize what the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has said: the government is doing everything possible to help people who are having difficulty with their shelter costs. I must say to the hon. leader of the Liberal Party that one of the important things that must happen is that the system has to allow market forces to work, and when market forces work, then and only then do you see the circumstances which may require additional government action.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
The Member for Highwood.

Crown Land Access

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask a question of the Attorney General. Last spring the issue of access/trespass gained the attention of many Albertans, particularly in my constituency, when the decision by Judge Robbins ruled in favour of the defendant. Many ranchers, grazing co-ops, and fish and game associations have been awaiting the appeal decision. Now, inasmuch as the Attorney General filed the appeal, what responsibility does he and his department accept in the resolution of this matter?

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, that's sub judice.

MR. ROSTAD: Actually, Mr. Speaker, in answer to the parrots over here, it must be answered with some caution, because there is a possibility of sub judice.

The matter was appealed, and the appeal court came down with a decision indicating that the trial court – which found that the alleged trespasser did have rights, which was overturned in the Court of Queen's Bench – did not have enough facts to make the decision that was made in that level of court, and it has been sent back to the trial court for a rehearing. In the context of the question from the hon. member, it is definitely a concern of a number of people who hold leases on public lands as to whether they have the right to control those lands as if owned privately in terms of access of other people, and, of course, the counter side from people who would like access for either skiing or hunting. It's important that the court does address this issue.

MR. TANNAS: Well, then, will the minister assure my constituents and this Assembly that he and his department will bring the case forward at the earliest possible time to resolve this important issue of access and trespass?

MR. ROSTAD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We will try and work it through the court system as quickly as possible. I can indicate that the accused has been charged and served, and the matter will be coming forward in due time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Edmonton-Kingsway.

Principal Group Police Investigation

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Attorney General. Yesterday we were treated to the Provincial Treasurer's admission that this government spent over a million dollars paying legal fees for Don Cormie because he couldn't pay them himself. Yet we know that when the Code inquiry reported last July, the Cormie family still owned a ranch, a yacht, numerous houses, a Canadian company, Collective Securities Ltd., and two investment companies in Ontario. On top of that, they transferred \$4 million to a bank in New York. My question to the Attorney General, then, is: when the government knew that as well as paying tens of millions of dollars compensation to Principal contract holders it was bearing their cost of Cormie's legal fees, why has the government made absolutely no effort to either recover Cormie's assets or lay criminal charges against those responsible for the Principal disaster?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, in regards to the Attorney General's department we do have responsibility for the administration of justice in criminal areas. The hon. member has been present in the House numerous times when I've outlined the intensive investigation that is being undertaken in this matter. There are literally tons of documents to go through. The RCMP have put four officers on this matter. They have their own exhibits room. But it isn't just a matter of going through the documents one at a time. If you do detect anything, you then have to trace any of the proceeds that might be involved in those particular documents to find that there is cause for a criminal action. In fact, that is being done.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, what we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that a lot of money has been spent, and still nobody has been charged.

The agreement with Cormie that originally exempted those properties I just named also had a clause in it that said that if there was any fraud or fraudulent behaviour the deal was off. So is the Attorney General telling us today, then, that they've not been able to find any evidence of fraud or fraudulent behaviour? Is that what he's saying?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I think the previous answer answered that. If they didn't read from a script and listened, they would save a lot of hot air. Aside from that, it is the court that determines whether there's fraud or not, not the Attorney General's department.

MR. SPEAKER: That's right. Thank you.
Calgary-Buffalo.

Code Inquiry Costs

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a question for the Provincial Treasury, aka Robbie Robertson as well. It's with respect to the same topic: the government payment of \$1.1 million of Donald Cormie's legal expenses with respect to the Code inquiry. Now, there's some strange reasoning by the Treasurer, who says that they agreed to pay Mr. Cormie's legal fees because he couldn't afford them, yet at the same time indicates that he entered into an agreement for reimbursement of 75 percent of those fees if Mr. Cormie was criminally convicted, even though he couldn't afford to pay the fees to

begin with. Now, maybe you can understand it, Mr. Speaker, but we sure can't. I'm wondering whether the Provincial Treasurer is prepared to tell us exactly what the deal he made with Mr. Cormie is with respect to legal fees and how he expects anything to be repaid if Mr. Cormie wasn't able to afford the legal fees to begin with.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, it is in fact accurate that the government, through the inquiry process, did pay the legal fees for Mr. Cormie, along with a variety of other individuals – including, by the way, a member of the opposition – because we felt that this was a public inquiry. This was a public-driven inquiry where the public had the need to know. So there is a relatively long list of reasons why we agreed to underwrite the legal costs. In many cases it was because all inquiries in the province of Alberta have in fact been underwritten by the province because these are very extensive, take a great deal of time. It would, in fact, be a fairly onerous financial burden on most people, including many of us here on this front bench if we had to go through the process, to have those costs covered. So on a broad basis, because it was a public inquiry, driven by the public need to know, not at all a court process, in fact public inquiry costs have been covered.

Now, we went on to cover a variety of costs, Mr. Speaker, including chartered accountants' fees, lawyers' fees, because all Albertans, including the opposition, wanted to have a full accounting as to what happened in this case. They wanted to know what happened. So as a result of the very exhaustive investigation, an investigation headed by Mr. Code, you saw what happened. You saw the conclusions spelled out. As a result of an investigation headed by the Ombudsman, you saw the conclusions, Mr. Speaker. Albertans wanted the process, we paid the bills to ensure that the fullest possible examination of the issue was undertaken, and we make no apologies for it.

Now, there was a condition, Mr. Speaker, that in the case of Mr. Cormie – and this has been raised in the House before, so it's not new. As a matter of fact, the Member for Little Bow asked me in '88, and two members from the Liberal opposition asked me in '89, and the Member for Edmonton-Belmont, as a matter of fact. So it's not new information. We've indicated before that we were going to pay the fees for Mr. Cormie and that when the time came, we would make the information public. We have done just that through the public accounts. If it is possible to recover some of the fees from Mr. Cormie as a result of his being charged, then we'll do just that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to direct this question to the Attorney General. I wonder whether the Attorney General could tell us whether he doesn't perceive it to be improper and a conflict of interest for this government to have an economic interest to the tune of 75 percent of these legal fees in the event of a successful prosecution which will be carried forward by this government itself.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, coming from someone who attests to being a lawyer, I'm extremely surprised by the level of intelligence it takes to ask that type of question.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Innisfail.

Travel Agency Default Insurance

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Over the years there have been a number of travel agents or companies that have gone into receivership and left the travelers to lose their deposits or stranded, to pay their own way home. A number of my constituents have asked me, "What is the government doing?" My question to the minister is: what has the minister done to help protect the people of Alberta who book their tickets through travel agents and companies?

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member. It is an important one, and many Albertans have suffered as a result of some travel industry failures in the past. I'm pleased to indicate that the travelers' association of Alberta has agreed to a government proposal that would ensure that they offer every traveler an insurance package that would cover defaults. Also, they would require a form to be signed by that traveler in the event that he or she chose not to take that insurance. I believe that in the future that will assist the Alberta traveling public in guaranteeing that the dollars they put into travel arrangements are in fact paid for or that the individual takes that chance and knows it when they, in fact, sign the contract for that travel arrangement.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Innisfail.

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Why doesn't the minister make the travel companies carry their own insurance so that all travelers are protected automatically?

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, on the surface of it, the hon. member's suggestion of an insurance fund would be a reasonable one, and we do, in fact, require that kind of insurance with other industries in the province. The difficulty is that the Alberta travel industry is much smaller than other provinces where such funds exist: British Columbia, Ontario. The difficulties there in terms of developing a pool of capital that would deal with defaults and yet not penalize the companies that are stable in that respect and in fact would deal with the companies that are not is much more difficult. In British Columbia, for example, the government has had to subsidize on a number of occasions the fund that's there. It would be my opinion that Alberta individuals who do not travel would be very reluctant to subsidize the traveling public who may be able to afford those kinds of packages if that public has the ability to insure their own travel plans.

Outfitting and Guiding

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife spent more than 80,000 tax dollars to artificially create the Professional Outfitters Association of Alberta. He then created a new class of nonresident hunting tags for big game. A small group of guides and outfitters control the Professional Outfitters Association. A small group has bought up a major share of the new class of tags that have been issued through the department. These tags will further restrict the access of Albertans to big game hunting in the province, and in the long run they will allow a fortunate few to control lucrative revenue from outside of the province. A lot of Albertans are amazed at the number of tags that have been issued.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'm sorry. You're now into your fourth sentence. Let's have the question, please.

MR. McINNIS: Sixteen hundred and twelve moose, 289 elk, 1,350 white-tailed deer, 1,086 mule deer . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, the question, please.

MR. McINNIS: In view of these concerns will the minister consider a one-year moratorium on the new class of tags so that Albertans have a chance and have some input into this particular policy before it comes into effect?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member's been, but we didn't artificially create an association for the outfitters and guides. It is there; it's not artificial. This has been a very sensitive issue to deal with. There has been a wide variety of interest on all sides in trying to resolve this issue, and we arrived at a process that gave the opportunity through the free market to decide who would be successful and who wouldn't. I must say that it was pretty well equally distributed right across the small and large operators across this province.

In answer to the last question of his long oratory about whether or not there would be a moratorium put on outfitting and guiding, the answer is no.

MR. McINNIS: The question was: a moratorium on the policy. The Premier wrote to a number of Albertans, and I quote:

The backbone of our economy is small business, and I would not support any outfitting policy that discriminates against it.

Well, the new guiding/outfitting policy not only discriminates against small business operators; it throws a lot of them right out of the business. I would like to ask the Premier on behalf of the government: why don't you go to a system where you separate the tag from the outfitting business so that the outfitting industry doesn't sell Alberta tags to nonresidents, go to that type of system?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister responsible for this policy has just explained to the member, the government is taking some considerable amount of time and has gone through a very long consultation process with the people who are involved and then, having gone through the consultation process, is required, is responsible to make a decision and then come out with a policy. Now, the hon. member is typical of his party and unfortunately typical of the opposition. They want to have a moratorium on something. They want to shut down something. They want to stop something. They are trying, Mr. Speaker, to stop the solid development of this province. We are a government, we have been elected to make decisions and to govern, and we're going to do it in the best interests of Albertans.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Belmont, followed by Westlock-Sturgeon.

Vermilion Health Care Complex

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Provincial Treasurer. In 1988 at least 15 employees of the Vermilion Health Care Complex were advised that they would have to pay, retroactive to the beginning of their employment, all local authorities pension plan contributions that had

gone uncollected for up to 10 years due to a management error. My understanding is that management has now advised these employees that very soon an arbitrary amount will be deducted from their paycheques to correct that management error and that no further dialogue will take place with respect to this matter. Given that this error is the fault of management, would the Provincial Treasurer intervene and cancel the demand that the workers pay many years' worth of pension contributions that they can ill afford to pay?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate; I wasn't too sure. I'm assuming that the member is speaking about the Gainers Inc. problem. [interjections] Then if it is of a technical nature, it's something which may well be better on the Order Paper, because it seems to require quite a technical answer.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, it's with respect to the Vermilion health care centre and the employees that have worked there for a long period of time. They haven't had their pension contributions deducted for up to 10 years due to an error of management. What I was asking the Provincial Treasurer to do was to intervene and cancel the demand that the workers now have to pay a lump sum or have an arbitrary amount deducted from their paycheque to catch up for 10 years' worth of management error.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I do empathize with the point made by the member. What I can say is that perhaps during estimates I'll have a chance to catch up on this point. But as I said before, it either could be done by a motion for a return or maybe the member may raise it during the estimates, at which time I could deal with it.

However, as others have pointed out, if you are getting a benefit from a pension plan, then you're expected to make some kind of a payment. I'm sure that if there was a mistake made in terms of the deductions at source for any particular government employee, there would be an easy way for that payment to be caught up. I think it would be only acceptable that that easy way would be better than saying, "I'm sorry; you're absolved from making any payments whatsoever." That remains to be seen in terms of the details, but I'll check that for the member and probably reply during estimates.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

Agricultural Assistance

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has made much in the past about helping Alberta farmers, in spite of the fact that we have somewhere between 15 and 25 percent of our farmers in a financial crunch. He has said, of course, that agriculture is the backbone of the province. But we now have the national Agriculture minister, Mr. Mazankowski, offering to pay somewhere around \$80 million to \$100 million to Alberta farmers provided it is matched by Albertans. Now, what I and, I think, many other farmers would like to know because of the urgency of the spring season coming up is: when is the minister once and for all going to cut out this sniveling and bragging about how much the government has spent in the past and come up with the fact of whether or not he is going to match this offer today?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I think that if the hon. Member for Westlock-Sturgeon were to read carefully *Hansard* of Monday, he would be educated on a number of things that this government has already done to assist our number one industry in recognition of the difficulties it's facing. We are taking the position, as I stated very plainly Monday, of saying to the federal government: "Thank you for coming in. We will assist you in developing the program and assist you in developing the money." I might point out to the hon. member that with budget adjustments that the federal government has made over the last year or so, their takeout of our Alberta agricultural industry is in excess of \$60 million. Now they're offering to put back \$80 million to \$90 million and we say, "Welcome."

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, rather fruitless to tell which Tory is dissembling.

I can't help but remember General de Gaulle saying that the British were ready to fight the Germans till the last Frenchman. It would appear, Mr. Speaker – I want to ask the minister: are you prepared to keep fighting Ottawa to the last Alberta farmer?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to make sure that the Alberta farmer gets fair and equitable treatment to any other farmers in western Canada.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Beverly.

Renters Assistance

(continued)

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier this afternoon. Since 1987 this government has been subsidizing loans of 6 percent interest to developers, and those landlords now are gouging tenants in many ways. Tenants have been getting shortchanged, and they don't really care about the free market mumbo jumbo. This government is playing favourites with developers and homeowners actually at tenants' expense. How does this Premier justify no help for renters and no help with tax credits for renters?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, to a great extent this question has been answered by the Minister of Municipal Affairs already today. He went in some detail into the whole rental market in our province. The hon. member is obviously making an additional request for the government to increase its budget in some large amount in order to bring another program into the system. As I pointed out to the House earlier today, one of the vital things that must happen when you have a change in any market is to allow market forces to operate. It's only then, after the market forces have been able to operate, that you can see if there are distortions that need additional assistance or dealing with by the government. Now, the hon. member may refer to it as market forces mumbo jumbo, but in fact that is the real world. It is not a matter of state control; it is not a matter of socialism. If the hon. members look around, the world is crying for freedom, not state control and socialism. It's been a bad year for socialists, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EWASIUK: Well, it's going to be a bad year for the Tories before too long, Mr. Speaker.

Renters are fed up, Mr. Speaker, and they've said enough is enough. If this Premier is seriously concerned about tenants,

why doesn't he show some leadership and agree to implement a rent review board process?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, shortly the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs will be making public a report on landlord and tenancy matters in this province. That report perhaps will throw some additional information before the people of Alberta, and we hope that it will help the hon. member in assessing the government's assistance and potential options with regard to future assistance. But, again, I want to point out the comments the Minister of Municipal Affairs made today: some 18,000 renters, young people, assisted into owning their own homes by government programs. It gives a new stability, a new emphasis to communities and families when they are able, with the assistance of the government, to move from rental accommodation to their own homes. That shows a government working to help the people.

Runaway Children

MR. SHRAKE: Mr. Speaker, in this province unfortunately some young people will run away from home and end up on the streets, and I guess we all know the dangers facing our young people who are on the streets. In my constituency the 12-year-old daughter of a single parent ran away, and the police picked her up to give her to social services. They took her to a home, and at the home they informed her, "We will not hold you against your will." So when the police left, she promptly left very shortly after. My question to the Minister of Family and Social Services: could he explain to the Assembly why his department and his people do not restrain these very young runaways?

MR. OLDRING: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we share the members' concern about young people on the streets today. I can only say this. From the department's perspective and through our child welfare offices we certainly work with those young people. Our primary focus is to help them back into their own homes and reunite them with their own families, and that's where we put our major focus. We also obviously look for appropriate treatment services for these young people. We work with a number of community agencies, and I'm very pleased with the response in the major cities from concerned Albertans in terms of working with these young people. To suggest that we should hold them against their will – we're not mandated for it. We can't take young people and pull them off the streets and lock them up. That's going well beyond our mandate.

MR. SHRAKE: Well, supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: First, hon. member, might we have unanimous consent of the House to complete this series of questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

MR. SHRAKE: Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister have his department review this problem and see if there is some method where we can at least restrain them long enough to reunite the young runaways with the parents before they get away again?

MR. OLDRING: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we're always looking for appropriate care and appropriate treatment for these young people, but ultimately, in terms of locking them up or confining them, only the courts can make those kinds of determinations, not the Department of Family and Social Services.

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

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a point of order, *Beauchesne* 408(1)(a). When I asked the Provincial Treasurer my question, he got up and either didn't understand the question or didn't hear the detail of the question and suggested that I put the question on the Order Paper. He thought I was asking about Gainers, when in fact I was asking about workers at the Vermilion health care centre. I tried to explain the point of the question, and I assumed that was the first question. The Treasurer got up and still offered that he might investigate the matter. Now, with respect, there is a matter of urgency related to this, because workers at the Vermilion health care centre, not Gainers, may soon have moneys deducted from their paycheques. If the minister is going to investigate, I'd like to ask a second question about the deduction of moneys from their pay.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. The Chair is not responsible for the quality of the question or the quality of the answer. In this case a question was asked, a response was given, albeit there seemed to be some confusion. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that we're going to have these points of clarification going back and forth in question period as to what is transpiring. So I'm sorry, hon. member, you were not able in your mind to be able to ask the second question. In terms of the urgency of the matter I believe you are certainly absolutely free to contact the Provincial Treasurer as soon as question period is over and to make your point there on behalf of those individuals concerned.

Is this on another point of order?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping I'd have an opportunity to introduce some guests. I delivered a message.

MR. SPEAKER: Might we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.
Public Works, Supply and Services.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**
(*reversion*)

MR. KOWALSKI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the members of the Assembly for that permission. The Legislative Assembly today is very privileged to have an opportunity to welcome 30 of Alberta's most productive and astute citizens, 30 senior citizens from the Barrhead-Westlock area. They're seated in the members' gallery and are led by their co-ordinator, May Hoisted, and their driver/convenor, Gilbert Behiel. One of the gentlemen had indicated to me that the first time he had an

opportunity to visit this building was in the 1920s. He further added that nothing really had changed; the building is just as stuffy today as it was then. My guests are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise, and I'd like all of our colleagues to extend their warmest welcome.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

head: **Main Estimates 1990-91**

**Occupational Health and Safety and
the Workers' Compensation Board**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Members of the committee, we are discussing vote 12 of the Executive Council estimates, to be found on page 185 in the main book, with the elements to be found on pages 76 and 77 of the elements book. I would invite the minister of Occupational Health and Safety to introduce his estimates.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to stand in my place and present the estimates of both Occupational Health and Safety and the Workers' Compensation Board. I'd like to first of all acknowledge my staff who are in the gallery, who have worked diligently and have provided me with support over the last 11 months. We'll take it from there.

Mr. Chairman, it's been just 11 months since I entered this portfolio, and I find it challenging and rewarding. Many changes have occurred and many more will come. Occupational health and safety legislative initiatives are in the process, and we're looking at radiation regulations, asbestos regulations, coal dust regulations, mine safety: the list goes on.

We've made some significant accomplishments, Mr. Chairman, in the past year, but we're going to place more emphasis on leadership and on partnership between Occupational Health and Safety and the Workers' Compensation Board. I think it's important that Occupational Health and Safety and the Workers' Compensation Board work hand in hand on the problems of safety and, of course, the reduction of injuries in the work force. We have an agreement now where the Workers' Compensation Board will provide a million dollars in conjunction with the aspects of Occupational Health and Safety input to make sure that we can reduce, where possible, injuries in the workplace.

Injury in the workplace comes through a number of ways, and we're working very, very diligently with industry and with the workers through comprehensive health and safety programs. We want to interact with government departments, and I believe many, many government departments fall into the role of safety and how we can reduce injuries, not just in the workplace in the industry but also within government.

We're involved also, Mr. Chairman, in a study on drugs and alcohol in the workplace. I hope that as time goes on we'll be able to provide some direction in that respect. We're also working on safety in the sour gas fields, the emissions of sour gas, as in some instances we've had some injuries. We have to look deeply into that and see if we can come up with solutions in reducing that element of injury and bad health to workers. We have an injury reduction program that we're going to put in

place in regards to oil and gas development. There's also a program where we look at high-voltage power lines. We're involved with the Alberta Home Builders' Association. I just want to go back to that, the Alberta Home Builders' Association. I believe that this year, 1990, and 1991-92 will be dramatic years for house construction in the province, and we have to make certain that we work with that industry to make sure the industry is safe and that the worker is safe. We have a program working with the forestry industry, and that's important because forestry at the present commands one of the highest assessment rates in workers' compensation. We have to make sure that we do everything possible to see that industry takes care of its workers and reduces injuries. Small business, young workers: just to name a few.

Mr. Chairman, we had an action committee developed out of the round table out of Jasper which involves a number of industries. It involves cities, municipalities, hospitals, the Department of Labour, and the labour force. This is to promote health and safety, to identify needs, and to involve the public. We're working very closely with the oil and gas industry, and we want to make sure that when we have new people entering that work force they have a concept of what's there and are involved in a safety training program. In 1988 we had 19 fatalities, and I'm pleased to announce that in 1989 it was reduced to eight fatalities. That's a step in the right direction, but in my mind eight is eight too many, and if we can continue with the oil and gas industry, we can reduce that dramatically.

The petroleum industry have a task force, and they're working towards safety on their own. We have joint worksite health and safety committees throughout the province, and at the present time we have over a thousand of these committees on a voluntary basis. I'm asking all industries to become more involved and to promote voluntary committees on their own. We're going to focus on high-accident industries, and we're going to make them aware of what we want and insist that they do it on a voluntary basis. In my recent discussions with a number of industries, they've accepted to do that.

Mr. Chairman, it's not to say that with the legislation we have in place – if we have to, we will enforce it, but rather I would sooner work with the industry and make sure they do it on a voluntary basis. Some people say, and I've heard that from across the way, that enforcement is the only answer. But an inspector behind every tree, when you have 70,000 industries, is pretty hard to accept. So my goal is to continue to communicate and to educate – and I want to emphasize "educate" – the industry and the worker to make sure they're safe. Yes, some say that if there is an injury in the workplace, it's all the fault of the employer; in some cases they say it's the fault of the employee. Well, I can't accept that. I think both employer and employee must take equal responsibility. There is no way that any worker in the province of Alberta should enter an unsafe workplace.

So, Mr. Chairman, when we look at safety, we don't just look at it in the workplace; we look at it in the home, in leisure, at play. It's not just a worksite concern; it's a concern of everybody from the family up to the jobsite. We're looking at a number of ways of having prevention implemented. We must know that when you have an injury, the cost to that industry, the cost to that employer, the cost to the family is dramatic. We have to change the attitudes of our workers, because in some cases – and I know it's happened to myself. I say when I do something, "Well, it won't happen to me, so I really don't have to take precautions; I don't have to wear safety clothes." We have to

change that, we have to start paying attention, and we have to think of safety, not carelessness.

Sadly, we had some fatalities in 1989, but they were reduced from 1988, and that's a step in the right direction. When you look at it, we have some 60,000-plus employers involved in 800 industries, and we cover some 900,000 workers in the province of Alberta through workers' compensation. We have 86 health and safety officers within Occupational Health and Safety, and in the last year we've inspected 4,928 worksites, we've had 3,500 consultations with employers, we've provided some 2,000 packages of special education, and we've investigated a little over 1,100 complaints.

Mr. Chairman, over the next number of years I have two concerns. The young worker who leaves the education field and moves to his or her first job – we want to make sure those people are educated and know the concerns of that work force. My second concern would be small business. We have to find a way to get a message to our young people and to small business.

In regard to our young workers we have to make sure that the heroes program which is available now to all schools gets to them more often than in the past. We have to make sure they know their choices, the choices of what will keep them alive, what will keep them healthy, and what will keep them safe. This year, Mr. Chairman, Safety Week will be June 17 to June 23, and our focus will be on the young worker. Education is the key, and we will promote education wherever we can and as often as we can to make sure the young worker is aware of the difficulties in the workplace.

Small business. We have over two million people across Canada working in small business. Small business provides some 80 percent of the jobs in the country. Small business is more labour intensive than any other industry. They're creative, they're flexible, they're adaptable, but at times they don't have the expertise, the funding to make sure that the information is available, and we have to do a better job there. I'm told in some cases that small business has difficulty coping with government red tape, with growth amongst themselves, and we're here, Mr. Chairman, with Occupational Health and Safety to make sure we reduce that red tape and provide the necessary information as often and as precisely as we can.

Sometimes we hear from the organized labour people that what they want is legislation. They want government interference, and they don't really think that education is the way to go. But I can't accept that. We have to provide information.

MR. TAYLOR: For some people, it's impossible.

MR. TRYNCHY: Yes. I suppose, Mr. Chairman, if you look at the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, it would be impossible.

We have the Occupational Health and Safety advisory council that is spearheading a new project in my constituency. They're going to involve a number of small businesses. These businesses will pay up front for education, and we will come back in a year and monitor them. They're asking for this kind of support, they're asking for this kind of education, and we want to see if that's the route to go in how we can help small business. So I'm pretty excited about that.

Mr. Chairman, we have to have health and safety programs at the worksite, and I'm sure that over the summer, with the conversations I'm having with small business, with industry, with labour, these can be put in place. We need to influence social changes. That's difficult, because everybody tells us – and

they've told me: "Government, stay out of my hair. I'm okay. Leave me alone." But when something happens, they come back to us. So we have to find a way where we can intermingle with these industries and make sure they have the information they need.

Drinking and driving is no longer acceptable, and I say to you and I say to all Albertans: unsafe and poor safety habits of employers or workers is not acceptable either. So we're looking at ways to contribute to safety in the workplace. We're looking at ways where we can promote safety with the individual, with family, community life. We want to say that if we want to work safely, we want to play safely and we want to live safely. We're moving in that direction, Mr. Chairman, and I'm pleased that I'm just a small part of that development in occupational health and safety.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to now move, if I may, to the workers' compensation end of my responsibilities. I just want to advise that 1989 has been a year of change for the board. We now have a new board of directors, nine dedicated Albertans who have agreed to serve. Some have just been on the job since last November, and I'm pretty excited at the way the nine members have worked together, sitting around the table. I've sat there and listened to them. We have labour, we have industry, and we have the public sector involved, and when they speak, you wouldn't know who they represent. They represent the safety of the worker, and they're looking at programs on how we can improve that safety factor.

We've appointed in the last few months a number of new appeals commissioners. We now have four teams of three people to hear appeals on workers' compensation, and that will remove the backlog of compensation concerns that have been going on for months. I was disturbed and disappointed when I took this portfolio that we were so far behind. I can assure you now that we're moving to where we're within weeks of cleaning up all of those.

MR. GIBEAULT: Are you criticizing the former minister?

MR. TRYNCHY: I'm not criticizing anybody. We have a system that was backlogged. When you have 60,000 injuries a year, you can imagine what happens when you only have a certain amount of people to do it.

Mr. Chairman, it's the first time in history that the Workers' Compensation Board met with employers across the province and talked about their assessment. They've got some flak from them, but it's because nobody understands the assessment. I've been in business for 30 years; I get the Workers' Compensation form, and it says: you owe so much. I pay it, and I don't really understand it. So I've asked the Workers' Compensation people to make a form available that anybody with a grade 4 education can understand, and in that way we'll all be in good shape. They tell us that their assessment is too high, and I want to say this very, very clearly: assessment in the Workers' Compensation Board is accident driven. So if you can reduce your accidents, you can reduce your assessment. Your assessment only goes up because of accidents, and so we have to do that.

I just want to say that our assessment rates are some of the lower ones in Canada. We have some 540 industries paying less than \$4 per hundred; 233 pay less than a dollar per hundred. The lowest assessment rate is 20 cents, and the highest one is logging, at \$1330. The only reason logging is at \$13.30 is because they have some of the most serious accidents. That's why I mentioned at the outset that with Occupational Health

and Safety and our new forest industry sector, we'll be working with it.

The Workers' Compensation Board is changing to be a service driven organization, not by rules. We're going to work by excellence and we're going to work in co-operation with the employer. We want to have a better, more efficient organization.

We are involved in the window of opportunity program. That's a program where we've allowed the roofing industry and the meat packing industry to remain at the assessment level of last year, and if they can reduce their accidents, they will stay there or come down. If they don't reduce their accident rate, they will then pay the assessed rate of 1988 and '89, plus a penalty. So that's an incentive not in dollars but an incentive to reduce the accidents. I'm told that if we reduce accidents by 15 percent in some of these industries, we can save \$30 million. So it's not something that we should take lightly.

We are now providing case managing programs where a worker will stay with one person. It's sort of called one-stop service. That person will work directly with the injured worker right straight through until their case is resolved.

We have a back care program set up in Calgary, and it's timely. I think it's one of our most difficult cases within compensation, because it's so difficult to diagnose a back injury.

We're looking at re-employment services before the worker is fit to go to work, and we're placing more and more emphasis on this. We want to get the worker fit for work sooner, and we want to get that worker back on the job sooner. We want to do that not by forcing the worker to go back before they're fit, but get to them at the start of their injury, work with them, get them back on their feet, get them back into the workplace as quickly as possible.

Another exciting thing we're doing is the imaging program. Presently if you have a file with the Workers' Compensation Board, it moves up into - I believe it's four steps. It's a file that moves from office to office, person to person, and as a worker goes through this, it might take, for one of those steps, three or four days to look at it; it takes the next person three or four days; it takes the third person three or four days; and the fourth person three or four days. So you're into weeks. I think the people that were at the rehab centre when we had our dinner the other week were told that by the Workers' Compensation Board. Well, what we're going to do now is put in an imaging system where we'll have all of these files on a computer. So no matter where you're at or no matter who wants to see that file, you touch a button, and five or six or 10 people can read that file at the same time. That'll help us get the people back to work much, much quicker. It'll save just millions of dollars in the long run because the people will not be on compensation but will be back working, and not waiting three or four weeks for an adjudicator or somebody to look at them.

Mr. Chairman, we're improving our customer services. We've looked at it strongly and we're responding quicker. We're responding to our calls and letters promptly, and we do it fairly and with care. We've added more adjudicators, and we've decreased their workload. We've also provided a better work environment within some of our buildings. We are, as I've said before, communicating more with our other government departments, and we have to. In cases where a person doesn't qualify for compensation, they should be able to be told what else they can do - whether they should go to social services, unemployment insurance, or under the assured income for the

severely handicapped – and they should be told that before the benefit stops, if they do not qualify for compensation further.

We have a new dialogue with Alberta Medical Association. We must improve our communications so the doctor in Edmonton and the doctor in Valleyview or wherever speak the same language in regards to injuries, so we don't have a worker who says, "Well, I went to my doctor, and he doesn't agree with this," or "I've gone here, and they don't agree with that." We have to make sure that the communications are right, fair, and honest. We have a head/brain injury unit specializing in rehab and assisting the brain-injured workers. I'm pleased with that, and we've had some very, very good comments. As I've said before, we have a forestry unit that specializes in working with the industry, and that is something that must happen.

On our appeals, Mr. Chairman: I can assure you they'll be heard quicker. We now, as I've said, have four teams with three people. Decisions will be given within days, not weeks, not months. If I could just say very, very quickly about the Appeals Commission, much has been accomplished in the last 11 months, but more still needs to be done, and we're going to do it.

I think we have to look at our appeals process – and I've mentioned that before – where people appeal and it has to go through three or four different steps. But it's interesting to note that we only have 3.5 percent of our claims that go through a claims services review committee; 1.15 percent go to the Appeals Commission; and then the third step, if they're not satisfied, is to go to the Ombudsman. But as I've said before, out of 60,000-some injuries a year we resolve 59,500 within a matter of days, and it's the last few that give us some difficulty.

I just want to say, Mr. Chairman, that within Workers' Compensation – and this is going back from 1980 to 1989 in the lost-time claims – within that period of time in Alberta we've had 457,000-plus claims; the total cost of compensation was over \$2 billion; and we've had 1,003 fatalities.

Mr. Chairman, am I on a time limit here? Four minutes? I'll try to wrap up as quickly as I can, and I think it's important that I just leave a few more messages for the members here.

Since I've taken the responsibility of the minister's office, we've had over 1,500 calls, and that includes personal visits; it includes personal meetings or letters answered by my office. My response to every worker when they come to my office has been that if a wrong has been committed, that wrong will be corrected, but if there wasn't a wrong, I cannot change the legislation to help them.

I think what we've got to do – and we all have to do that. I'm going to ask the help of all members. I've sent out these to all the members, and I'd like to have the page deliver them. We've developed a letter we want you to use if you have difficulties with some of your constituents. Make a number of copies of those and have them on hand. If you can't resolve them by phoning my office or phoning the Workers' Compensation Board, have them fill it out and get it to me. That way we'll be able to get this resolved as quickly as possible.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we have to concentrate on reducing injuries in the workplace. Our record's not that good. I'll give you an example before I sit down. In the last decade the construction industry had over 20,000 injuries. The cities had over 15,900 injuries; construction of homes and apartments, 12,900 injuries; the meat packing plants, 12,000-plus injuries; hospitals, over 12,000 injuries. And it goes on. So that's what we've got to do. All of us have a job to do, so let's talk safety. If we all take heed with respect to who we talk to, visit our small businesses, visit the people in our constituency – we all should

do that and say: "Okay. What are we doing wrong? How can we help you?"

Mr. Chairman, with that I wish that we all take heed, work with our constituents, and reduce injuries. I'll be pleased to answer some questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, with that nice rhetoric from the minister here I have to confess that I don't see it quite the same way. In fact, when I see the votes that he's presented before the Assembly here, vote 12 for Occupational Health and Safety Services, some \$12 million, barely up over last year in dollars and not up at all in manpower, in staff for the department, I have to wonder where this minister has been. I mean, the last year has been nothing short of a disaster in occupational health and safety in this province. We've had gassings of people at Weldwood; we've had poisonings at the plant in Medicine Hat; we've had deaths at the Daishowa plant. And I could go on; those are just some of the worst examples. It seems to me that any minister worth his salt would have proposed a significant increase in this department of Occupational Health and Safety. We would have had a substantial enhancement of the health and safety inspectors in this department, enforcement provisions, hygienists, and all the rest of the complement of health and safety people that we don't have.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, we don't even have a virtual no increase over last year, but this department's budget in '86-87, four budget years ago, was only \$11.6 million. So we've done virtually nothing in almost five years from where we were then, and the health and safety situation has got increasingly desperate. Let's be honest about it. With all these new chemicals that are coming out, plants going in, and so on, health and safety is increasingly becoming a more and more serious issue. It's clear that aside from the rhetoric of the minister, the fact that he's presented a budget estimate before us today that's virtually no different than it was five years ago is nothing less than an indictment of this particular minister and his lack of concern for the health and safety of Alberta workers. He's letting his department waste away, Mr. Chairman, and members of this Assembly who have any conscience at all will not support this kind of a budget estimate. It's not worthy of our support.

I want to say to this minister here that he ought to pay attention to what's happening in the environmental sector. More and more people are realizing that we're not prepared to sell our souls to contaminate our general environment, our lakes, our forests, our rivers, our streams. I would suggest that if this minister is paying attention to what's happening around us, he'll realize that the same kind of awareness is happening in occupational health and safety. It used to be during the boom years that people could make a lot of money and they didn't think a lot about health and safety. But, Mr. Chairman, more and more workers are saying that we are not going to tolerate health and safety conditions in our workplaces that make us sick, that are unsafe, that threaten our safety and our ability to provide for ourselves and our families. We're just not going to accept that, and this budget simply does not recognize that increasing awareness in our society.

Mr. Chairman, this budget estimate has no provision – at least I don't see it, and if it's here, I'd like the minister to show me where it is – no support for the initiative of the Alberta

Federation of Labour's Workers' Health Centre. Now, this is a centre that was taken as an initiative by the labour movement in this province to provide some assistance, some advice to workers and to injured workers regarding health and safety and workers' compensation and so on, that whole broad area. They tried to carry it as best they could by assessments on their affiliates, but that simply could not be sustained over the long term, and despite a number of pleas, this minister apparently has turned a deaf ear. I think that is a big mistake.

The workers' health centre concept is a dynamic one. It works well in Ontario, Manitoba, and other jurisdictions. These are centres that provide a variety of health and safety services to workers by workers, managed for workers in the interests of workers. This minister, if he had some sensitivity to that and was prepared to show some leadership, would want to support that. He hasn't yet, and it's not in this budget, as far as I can see. I would like to hear why he continues to refuse to co-operate with the people in the health and safety movement in this province and work together with them. He talked about the idea of new partnerships with a variety of people, but these kinds of actions, by refusing to work in partnership with organized labour in this province, undermine that rhetoric, Mr. Chairman. If he wants to work in partnership, I say that's great, but let's show some solid commitment to that, and let's get beyond rhetoric here.

Mr. Chairman, just today I had a long chat with an injured worker, a welder near the Duffield area. This welder brought to my attention some of the things that welders and building tradespeople are coming to recognize more and more. In his particular trade of welding the hazards that are exposed are really very, very serious. In fact, I had some information from people who make safety equipment in this area, and they say:

Exposure to welding fumes and gases can cause nose and throat dryness and irritation, chest pains, headaches, lethargy, sleepiness and nausea. Some fume particles may dissolve in the lungs and be transported by the blood or lymphatic system to other parts of the body, such as the kidney, liver or brain, where the effects are deadly.

Let me repeat that: those effects are deadly. Yet we don't have in this province regulations to assist welders in the welding trade that would provide protection against that.

Now, it's not because there is not equipment that would provide that protection. It's available, Mr. Chairman. Now, it costs a few bucks. A proper safety apparatus that provides forced air, clean air to welders as they're working, might cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$700. So it costs a few bucks, but surely we've got to say that for such a small investment, we must make that – it's not optional; it must be compulsory. We cannot simply allow people in trades like welding, where there are those hazards that are known and have been known for a long time, to be poisoned and to be contaminated when there are alternatives available. We cannot make safety and health optional in this province, Mr. Chairman; that's out. It's got to be mandatory. Particularly in the unorganized sector, but as well in the organized sector, there are employers who focus and are obsessed simply with the bottom line.

Without the kind of mandatory worksite joint health and safety committees that have been advocated by anybody who works in these environments with all kinds of hazards, without those kinds of committees that can assess these hazards and can in fact shut down a worksite when unsafe health and safety conditions exist, we're not getting very far. We need to have those kinds of committees at worksites across the province. Now, the minister said there are a thousand worksite health and

safety committees in the province. I don't think he meant that there are a thousand of them as provided by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which are registered and where minutes and records are kept of their activities to ensure that they are serving a useful purpose. But he said there's a thousand of them, thereabouts, and yet there are some 60,000 worksites in the province, something in that neighbourhood. So that's an awfully small fraction, Mr. Chairman. We know of many worksites where injuries and disabilities are taking place, if not in fact caused by then certainly aggravated by the fact that there is no entity at the worksite that takes responsibility for worksite health and safety.

Now, I know this minister has a hang-up with requiring people to do things, but, Mr. Chairman, we have recognized in many ways the necessity for compulsion in some areas of life. I mean, we don't make stopping at a red light optional. It's mandatory, and if people don't want to obey that law, there's a penalty to be paid. I only wish that the police officers I have encountered at speed traps had the lenient approach that this minister seems to have. It doesn't matter how many times you break the law; you just get a slap on the wrist, and you keep on going. We've seen that at Medicine Hat with this minister: 16 visits by the staff of his department and still no prosecution forthcoming. Wouldn't it be great if we could go through a speed trap 16 times and the officer says, "Well, listen, it's not nice to speed; please don't do it again," but nothing happens. I mean, sometimes you've got to have some consequences, Mr. Chairman.

The same thing with the seat belt law. We have a seat belt law. Why is that? Because some people, if they didn't have that law, would say, "Well, why wear it?" I know a lot of constituents, Mr. Chairman, who have said to me exactly this: "Now that we've got a seat belt law, I wear my seat belt because it is the law." Most people in this province are law-abiding people, and I would suggest that the same kinds of things apply here in the field of occupational health and safety. We have to have those provisions that require employers to make sure that their employees operate in a healthy and safe manner, and that is not optional. It cannot be optional. If we make it mandatory, employers will comply and we will have much reduced accidents, much reduced disabilities, much safer workplaces, much less distress of workers and their families than we have today, because it's a jungle out there now in the health and safety field; make no mistake about that.

Mr. Chairman, a lot of workers don't have much confidence in this minister of Occupational Health and Safety, it's sad to say. I mean, we had to go to extreme lengths here just recently to try and get some action with lead poisoning at the Medicine Hat plant of Alberta Recoveries & Rentals – still no prosecutions. This minister seems to want to take a hands-off approach and just hope to goodness that somehow people will be responsible even after showing repeatedly that they are not, in many cases. That just doesn't wash. We've got to have some firm legislation in place that requires, as I mentioned before, that all worksites in this province have health and safety committees. They ought to meet regularly. They ought to be responsible for identifying hazards, for making sure that all work is done in a safe and healthy manner, that workers have the kind of protective equipment they require to maintain their health, maintain their viability of looking after their families.

Now, I mentioned earlier the situation we've got at a lot of construction plants, Mr. Chairman, which is appalling. I mean, at Daishowa there have been a couple of deaths. In fact, I just talked to one constituent today who is involved in hauling steel

to that plant. He has told me that because of the prospects of legal action for environmental reasons, Daishowa has taken an approach to rush construction through regardless of the hazards. There's all kinds of unsafe activities going on there, and I think it's the responsibility of the minister of Occupational Health and Safety to make sure that projects like Daishowa and others around the province are not, in fact, rushed through under unsafe conditions the way the Oldman dam approach has gone. You know, pending legal action, they rush a whole lot of things through so they can say: "Well, we've got so much done. We can't stop working on it now." That seems to be the approach they're taking there, and that is simply unacceptable.

Now, Mr. Chairman, under the Occupational Health and Safety section, this minister is responsible for enforcing the regulations, but if you've taken a look recently, as I have, at the regulations for this department, you'll see that most of them have not been changed or updated for over 10 years. I mean, the only one that's current, really, is the chemical hazards regulation of 1989. What about all the other hazards? A lot of those regulations are out of date, and in light of all the new chemicals, new techniques, and so on that are being introduced regularly, this minister has a responsibility in his department to make sure that those regulations are current, that they're up to date. I want to ask him today to make a commitment to ensure that all of those regulations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act are updated, and on a regular basis, not once every decade; that's just not acceptable. Then once we've got regulations in place that are current and that are going to protect workers' health, we've got to have the other side of it, the enforcement. There is no point having a speed limit if you're not going to enforce it; the same thing with Occupational Health and Safety regulations. The enforcement section I think has been appalling in its lack of enforcement. Again, as I said, the budget here does not provide for any enhancement of the enforcement capability of the department.

Mr. Chairman, we could go on with Occupational Health and Safety, but I do want to turn to Workers' Compensation and make a few comments there. Now, some people refer to it as the Workers' Compensation Board, but I know more and more of my constituents and people I've talked to have referred to it as the employers' legal liability protection agency, because that seems to be if not its main focus certainly one of its primary focuses; that is, to protect employers from legal liability. There's been case after case. Colleagues of mine repeatedly tell me that, without exception, they get more complaints about workers' compensation than all the other government departments put together. Now, the minister indicated today some new initiatives that are forthcoming in workers' compensation. All I can say is that I hope they will result in some improvement in service, but I have to express some doubts about that.

He talks about an improvement in service; well, Mr. Chairman, you go down to the WCB building on 107th Street, and you walk in there and you tell me if you think that's a service-driven organization. You can't get past the front door, basically, if you don't have a security clearance to get past the guard. You want to look at your file? They've got video cameras trailing you. There are security guards, video cameras – it's a bunker. It's the kind of place that sends off the image of a prison. Injured workers, rather than coming to an agency that's there to help them, get the feeling of being inmates in this prison, of being watched, of being spoken to with disrespect, of not having any sensitivity to their claims and to their injuries. You just

have to talk to people who have been there, Mr. Chairman, to realize that.

I've spoken to injured workers in the past year from around the province, including Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray and other communities where the minister wasn't able to get up there and talk to these people, so I want to tell him a number of the things that people told me. One of the things that people were concerned about – and there's all kinds of horror stories out there, let me tell you. But one of the things they talked about, of course, is the question of pensions. Once a total or partial disability pension has been awarded, there has been a problem with these pensions not being indexed. Now, the minister the other day refused to answer questions in question period about it; maybe he can talk to this issue today. Mr. Chairman, there is no point in having pensions for workers if you're not prepared to protect the buying power of those pensions. This minister seems to think he's done something good by introducing a 10 percent increase when the cost of living since the last increase in '86 is up 18 percent. So that's only a half measure. Rather than his being of help to workers, this minister continues to insult them. No wonder there are hard feelings there.

I know this minister likes to talk about being a friend of the injured, but he's passing up an opportunity again tonight to speak to injured workers at a forum organized by Workers with Injuries, and I think that's regrettable, Mr. Chairman. I think the minister ought to take a lead role in trying to explain to injured workers how things work and what the problems are and what the board and the minister may be doing to try to improve things, because there are a lot of very, very serious situations out there of injured workers and problems with their claims and the bureaucracy.

Again, Mr. Chairman, this minister talked about forging partnerships, and I have to wonder how he views that, because a lot of people don't look at it that way. I mean, he called for nominations to the Workers' Compensation Board. Various people submitted nominations, including the largest workers' organization in this province, the Alberta Federation of Labour. The minister simply ignored their recommendation. Now, that's not the way to build a partnership. I wish this minister would think about that very seriously, because I want to put this minister on notice that when Bill 15 comes further before this Legislature, if we don't get some changes to the indexing of pensions, to the composition of the board, he is going to have one very large fight on his hands.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman, there have been all kinds of people trying to give this minister advice, free advice and good advice, and we don't seem to see much of that coming forward in terms of legislation or this minister's budget. For example, the Alberta legislative committee of the Canadian Railway Labour Association made a presentation to the government outlining some of their concerns that they wanted legislative action on by the government. The number one issue, of course, was workers' compensation. What did they ask? They want recognition of stress. Increasingly, Mr. Chairman, stress is a factor that workers in many occupations are facing. It's an occupational hazard that has to be recognized as such.

They talked about removing the wage ceiling from workers' compensation. Now, why should there be a ceiling there? It's currently somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$40,000. Mr.

Chairman, a lot of people would like to make that kind of money. Some workers do; some make a little more. Why should workers be penalized for being injured and have, say, a worker who makes \$45,000 and is already getting a penalty of 10 percent – they only get 90 percent of their net earnings when they make a claim, if it's accepted. Why should they have this additional penalty if they happen to be a well-qualified, skilled worker who makes a reasonable wage? Why should they be penalized for that? It doesn't make any sense. That's got to go.

The transportation workers also talked about the necessity of having health care and pension premiums continuing to be paid while workers are off work due to injuries. This is a big problem, Mr. Chairman. When people are at work, their pensions are being paid, their health care premiums are being paid, perhaps on a cost-shared basis, but when they're off work, they aren't, and that simply is not acceptable. People cannot be penalized in health care premiums and pensions and other benefits just because they've been injured. That is simply not fair, and that has to be changed. The Railway Labour Association also expressed the concern that if this government is serious about trying to reduce accidents, they've got to bring in regulations concerning the transportation of dangerous commodities. So there has to be action in a number of those areas, Mr. Chairman, if this minister is going to show some credibility and seriousness in responding to some of these important workplace safety issues.

Now, I also hope, Mr. Chairman – again this minister talked about partnerships, and he talked about being a friend of the injured and all that. Yet just in the past year we had the shameful incident of this government hauling away injured workers who wanted to exercise their democratic rights to protest against this government's policy – trumped-up charges which were later thrown out of court. I would like the minister here today, if he can speak on behalf of his government, to stand in his place and say that that kind of shameful episode will not occur here at the Legislature again, that injured workers who want to protest, as they have a democratic right to, will not be hauled off by police in the middle of the night, thrown in the slammer, humiliated, and have the kinds of things done to them that you only expect in a police state. That was utterly shameful, and just to prove that, Mr. Chairman, the courts threw it out.

Mr. Chairman, there's not much interest that we've been able to see of this minister trying to work co-operatively with the groups that represent injured workers in this province. There are injured workers' committees or groups in almost every centre in the province now; there are so many of them. One group is organizing a national conference, Mr. Chairman, the conference on the re-employment of injured workers. It's going to be sponsored during Occupational Health and Safety Week in Ottawa to talk about a number of areas: the impact of free trade on workers' compensation and rehabilitation; trends in the WCB across the country; the role of unions in the reintegration of injured workers back into the workplace; rehabilitation; occupational health and safety; forming a national network of injured workers working together trying to find common ground between injured workers' groups, disabled groups, and others. That seems like it's got a lot of prospects for some very good conferencing, networking, looking at the issues, coming up with some alternative ideas and solutions, things that government should be doing. I'd hope the minister would look kindly at trying to assist some of the injured workers' organizations in Alberta by attending a conference like that. Let's show some initiative here, some of the goodwill that this minister has toward

really trying to assist injured workers working together to get a fair and just deal from their respective workers' compensation boards.

Mr. Chairman, the minister referred briefly to the "window of opportunity," as he calls it, the idea of providing a special break on premiums for employers in the meat packing and roofing industries. I was listening carefully, and I didn't hear him give a status report on that project. Exactly what progress has been made on that? I mean, we talked about this last year. It's now a year later. Exactly how much reduction of accidents has there been in those industries under this project?

Now, Mr. Chairman, we've talked a lot about a number of the issues that are current in Occupational Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation, and I want to tell this minister that words are simply not enough, that we've got to have proper funding of Occupational Health and Safety. We ought to have an Occupational Health and Safety department that has more officers and staff than the wildlife branch. Surely workers in this province have the right to get as much protection as the wildlife in this province, and we've got to have enforcement of regulations and legislation. There's been a gross failure on that part, Mr. Chairman, and if this minister wants to show workers and injured workers in this province that he means business, we've got to have some action on that.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to look forward to the minister's response and comments on those particular areas, and we'll pursue this debate further.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister of Occupational Health and Safety, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've listened closely to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and he suggests that there's no manpower expansion. Now, I wonder what the hon. member would want for manpower expansion. We have 70,000 worksites. Do we have to have one for every worksite? Is that what he's looking for? I find that with our regional offices across the province, we cover the area very, very well.

MR. GIBEAULT: I imagine Daishowa wouldn't think so.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, I listened while he spoke. I wonder if he would have the courtesy to listen while I respond.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please proceed, hon. minister. I was attentive to the way things were developing, but if you would please proceed.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

He goes on to say that we've done nothing, yet we've reduced accidents over the previous years dramatically. We've done it not by having a policeman or an inspector behind every tree; we've done it by educating, by promoting education and making sure that the employer and the employee are talking and reducing accidents.

He said I have a lack of concern. Well, Mr. Chairman, I wonder where he gets that from. You know, last year that whole bench of the NDP said, "We'll challenge you." They raised their hands when I said my door was open. "We're going to flood your offices with calls, with people." And what happened? Outside of one member from Edmonton-Beverly who brought a worker to my office, nothing. Not one did he bring to my

office. He's never come to see me. He's never phoned me and said, "Look, I have a gentleman who wants to talk to you." But I've talked to some of his constituents, and they tell me that he couldn't help them so they came on their own. So if he really wanted to help his constituents and the people of Alberta, why didn't he sit down and talk with them and say: "Look, I don't think I can help you, but I know the minister's door is open. He'd be willing to see you, so come on in with me." Why doesn't he do that? You know, he said: "Give them more dollars. It's going to reduce accidents." Well, that's about the most foolish thing I've ever heard of. Give who more dollars to reduce accidents? If you don't educate the people – you can give your child all the money in the world, but if you don't educate that child on how to spend that money, it's blown. So unless he can come up with some ideas . . . And I'd welcome a letter from him – I'd welcome anything – saying, "Here, Mr. Minister, is how you can improve the system." I'd be glad to hear from him.

He tells me that we wouldn't offer funds to the Worker's Health Centre. Mr. Chairman, again not correct. This year I talked to Miss Susan Ruffo and I offered . . . I said, "Get your funds together and come and see me," and that hasn't happened. So how can I offer funds to an establishment that I understand now is closed with no response back to me? She was in my office. We had this chat. So again he's not telling the facts.

He talks about the welding hazards of a gentleman from Duffield. Yes, that gentleman was in to see me, the same gentleman, and I'm concerned about that. He says we have no program, yet we funded through the heritage fund a research program on welding which is available, was done by NAIT. And you know where it was sitting? In the union office where this gentleman, being a brother of the union, went to see one of the directors: in their desk, on the bottom. That's where he got the copy from, right from his own brothers in the union. So the document is there. I've seen it, and I've read it. It's a good document, done by NAIT. It's available, but why isn't it out there? I told this gentleman from Duffield, "What's wrong?" He was puzzled. He couldn't understand why he couldn't have had it before. So, Mr. Chairman, to suggest . . .

[Interjections by stranger in the public gallery]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order in the gallery here. Get this man out of here, please.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Sergeant-at-Arms.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, sir, please. Thank you.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, that document is available. One of these days, when I get a copy of it, I'll table it. It spells out a number of things that happen in regards to welding. So it's not a lie; it's a fact.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member goes on to say that if one breaks the law, they shouldn't get away, and I agree with him. Nobody should break the law and get away with it. And I don't have a hands-off approach. I am doing a full assessment of what happened in Medicine Hat. When I get that, if action has to be taken, I can assure you it will be.

I can give you as an example what happened at Daishowa: as soon as we heard there was an accident, we closed that place down. I can tell you about the accident in Calgary with the cement truck: when we knew of an accident, I asked my

department to close it down. I can tell you about the accident on the Oldman River dam: when that happened, we closed that down. If there's an accident anyplace, a big or a small industry – I'm not concerned what size – we will ask that industry to be closed down.

He tells us it's a jungle out there. Well, where is it? You know, "The world is falling." Give us some ideas. Where are all those concerns? Why doesn't the member write a letter? Why don't any of those people write a letter and say: "Look, here are some concerns, Mr. Minister. Would you help us correct them?" If a worker has a problem anyplace in this province, I would expect them to write me a letter. I've got a number of calls from workers confidentially, anonymously, saying, "We have a concern in a certain worksite." We go out and check it out right now and get it corrected. So we've got to do that. We can't be in every jobsite in Alberta unless, as I've said, we have 70,000 inspectors. If there are unsafe conditions at Daishowa, it's not my information that there are. We just had, as of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, two people there doing a complete tour of that site along with labour representatives, and that's not the story I get. But if something has changed since then, I want to hear about it. I've had the Daishowa people into my office, and they assure me, Mr. Chairman, that it's not a rush job. And I warned them that should something happen there in the future in regards to an incident or a death, they'll be closed down immediately. So they're willing to work with us. They've also agreed that they will have a joint worksite health and safety committee. That's positive, and that's what they're trying to do. I don't think there's anybody out there who wants to hurt the worker, but we have to work with them. That's what I call teamwork. [interjection] Yes.

He says he knows of many worksites that are unsafe. Well, if he really wants to help the people of Alberta and the workers of Alberta, give me some sites. For gosh sakes, members of this Assembly, give me something. I can't read your minds. If they give me a site and say, "Look, there's something there that doesn't look right," we'll investigate it immediately. We move very quickly.

Mr. Chairman, he spoke about complaints on the Workers' Compensation Board, the most complaints they get in that constituency office, and yet all the complaints from the NDP total nine in the last year; I've got them here. Where are these complaints? Get them to me. I can't help you if you just talk about it. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly brought a constituent in. "If he has more complaints," I told him, "my door is open. Bring some more or write to me." That's why I gave you those letters that you can use. Make copies of them. Get them to me. If you can't resolve the issue yourself, if you can't get it through compensation, let me have a look at it. I can't guarantee anybody that we can resolve it to their satisfaction, but I'll make one commitment, that they'll get a fair hearing, and that's what it's all about.

I suggest to all you members to go up here and visit the Workers' Compensation Board office that he says is so terrible. The hon. Member from Edmonton-Mill Woods was there.

MR. WICKMAN: No, from Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. TRYNCHY: Edmonton-Mill Woods, I'm sorry. I guess he was there too. But Edmonton-Whitemud, and I want him to speak on it. All you have to do is say clearly who you want to see. That person is brought down to you, or else you can go up

there. I've been there a number of times. I have no difficulty getting in there, and neither does any member of this Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: Put up or shut up.

MR. TRYNCHY: Would the hon. member wait until I'm done, and then he can speak again if he wishes?

It's hard for me to . . . They suggest to me that I wouldn't meet with injured workers. Well, Mr. Chairman, that is just nonsense. That is nonsense. There was a group that wanted to meet with me in Grande Prairie, wrote to me, phoned me, and I set up a date in my office. They couldn't make it. So shortly thereafter I went to Grande Prairie and met with them all. I've had the injured workers in my office. I've had injured workers in the office in Calgary. There isn't one worker – and I want to make this clear – any worker in the province of Alberta that wants to meet with me that I haven't met with or haven't an appointment to meet with him tomorrow.

He suggests that the cost-of-living pension is only 10 percent. He went on to say that the cost of living has gone up 18 percent. Now, I want to know where he got those figures, because I got the cost-of-living figures from Canada. The cost of living since 1986 in their calculation has gone up 11.3 percent. The public service pension since 1986 has gone up 9.4 percent. The compensation increase in the new Act we're proposing is going to be increased 10 percent. Now, where is that 18 percent? I can't find it. If he can, I'd like to have it, because if I'm wrong, I'll accept it. But I want to see that in writing, because that's what I've got.

He also says that we haven't done anything in regard to the minimum. Well, the minimum pension has been increased by 23 percent, from \$730 to \$900. That's a pretty good increase. Now, if he thinks the injured workers won't like it, I'd like to hear from those workers that suggest we have done wrong. He suggests to me that we didn't do right in appointing a new board. He suggests that the three people that represent labour are no good. That's what he's saying. They're not right. As soon as we have Bill 15 before the House, he's going to make some changes. We have three people representing labour and we have three people representing industry. We have three people representing the public, and one of those people represented on the board is an injured worker that's been through the system and knows what it's all about.

Now, if he has some suggestions, some ideas on what should happen, he should direct those suggestions, concerns, ideas to the new board, because they're the ones that are going to be making policy. We're also changing the Act so we don't have to come to the Legislature on a yearly basis or two years or three years to provide an increase in pensions. It will be done now at the recommendation of the board by order in council. That's a positive step; we're going to let the Workers' Compensation Board run their show. Now, I think every member here, if they have concerns, should go and take some time, either meet with the board if they want to or write them a letter and say, "Here's what you should be doing."

He suggested I should do something about the policing of this building. That's not my responsibility. I have nothing to do with that, so I can't help him there.

He wanted to know what happened to the window of opportunity. Well, had he been listening last year he should know that it started January 1, 1990, and it goes for two years. It'll be monitored every six months to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing, and the report will be available,

Mr. Chairman. It'll come back here, and as I said, if they don't decrease the injuries in that workplace, they'll pay the full rate of the assessment plus a penalty. But it just started. We have to give it time to work. The first six months are still not up.

Mr. Chairman, I think I've answered all the questions of the hon. member, and I'd be pleased to hear from other members.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by the Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In looking at the information I've gotten on the Workers' Compensation Board and listening to the presentation or the briefing the minister has provided us, I would like to make some comments.

First of all, I'm going to look at the Workers' Compensation Board. I have to say that there are some positive things there. I want to first of all touch on those positive things. I thought the idea of providing the opportunity for those Members of the Legislative Assembly to attend the rehab centre and go through a two-hour discussion with members of the board, with administration, with the minister there, was a good exchange. It gave us the opportunity to get an update as to progress, what activities are occurring. I also felt that the objectives the administration laid out were favourable. Now, as to whether those objectives can be met, I would hope so. I'm not sure.

The reference made by Ian Sinclair, the new vice-president, where he talked in terms of having the motto that the Workers' Compensation Board has to achieve customer satisfaction, I think is very, very important. I think that's a very important philosophy, because of course the Workers' Compensation Board is dealing with clients and it's no different than Woodward's, Sears, or the Bay. Those stores deal with clients and the Workers' Compensation Board deals with clients. In this particular case the clients are taxpayers or people that are protected by workers' compensation premiums. So they are entitled to customer satisfaction, and I would hope that motto remains in place and customer satisfaction will be achieved.

I was pleased with the reference I heard that a year from now every constituency office in Alberta will be able to lay off one staff member because complaints from injured workers will be down so dramatically. I hope that would turn out to be. I'm not sure the staff in the constituency office would like that to happen, because on a proportionate basis – although I've got to admit in recent times there has been a decrease in the number of clients we've had – to begin with in particular, workers' compensation cases were taking up a great deal of our time.

Part of the recently announced increase in pensions is very positive, the increase going up from \$730 to \$900 a month. Recognizing that those at the lower end have to get a bigger piece or a bigger bite of the action is good. The ones at the upper end, however, are going to have some problems; there's going to be dissatisfaction there because their level of benefits has been frozen for four years and will continue to be frozen. They're going to feel that they're entitled to the same cost-of-living increase as others, namely the 10 percent. I have to maintain that they do have a valid argument.

There's also the situation, Mr. Chairman – and I hope the minister would respond to this; if he would like, I'm prepared to have the person I'm talking about send him a letter with his workers' compensation claim number – that deals with an individual on long-term temporary disability compensation that's gone on for seven years, where the process hasn't allowed him to transfer from the classification of temporary to permanent

pension. So in effect he hasn't benefited by any increases in the seven years he's been on compensation. Those types of situations, even though there may not be provision in the Workers' Compensation Act at the present time, I think have got to be looked at on an individual basis, and if there are injustices there, those injustices should be dealt with.

The future increases that have to be looked at for workers on pension should be tied into the Workers' Compensation Act. There should be a mechanism built within the legislation that calls for an annual review of the level of pension so there is comfort to injured workers that the question of inflation is being addressed on an annual basis. Otherwise, we could find ourselves in a similar situation as social services has right now, where recipients under the assured income for the severely handicapped program have been frozen at a level for eight years. Then it becomes very, very difficult to catch up. Even this latest increase – when we look at it having gone for a four-year period, it's tough to equate the number of dollars or the percentage increase required to make up for that cost of living over that four-year period. Now, had it been done on an annual basis, of course that would not present the same problem.

The material the minister referred to that was sent to all the MLAs, to our constituency offices, with the form he distributed here earlier. To the minister. Yes, we have been sending this out to injured workers that felt they haven't received satisfaction. The question I would like the minister to respond to – particularly where the reference is made: what is the issue you wish to discuss with the minister? – I'd like to know if there is a screening process prior to an individual being allowed to meet with the minister. In other words, if the minister received 10 of these, do only two get to meet with him? Do the circumstances have to be very, very extreme before the minister is prepared to meet with them, or does he in fact have a true open-door policy? I'd also like to get an indication of some of the stats. I know that can't be provided today, but it could be provided later on. I'd like to know, for example, on a percentage basis the number of recipients of workers' compensation that would have benefited by the increase in the minimum level from the 730 to the 900, and what percentage may in fact have been frozen at the upper level, and then of course those in between, while we see the 10 percent across the board.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make reference to the new security measures at the Workers' Compensation administrative building on 107th Street. I experienced that problem. I was quite shocked when I went in there and was told I had to get security clearance in the form of a pass. I objected to it, and I was told that whether it's a cabinet minister, whether it's the minister of Occupational Health and Safety and workers' compensation, whether it's the Premier of this province, they would be required to get that security pass. There are two things wrong with that. Of course, I did send a letter to the minister on it, describing it as bunker mentality, and I did that for a reason. First of all, I think there was an overreaction on the part of the WCB in trying to counteract people that did have a habit of maybe just walking in the building and wandering around. There's nothing wrong with a reception area people have to report to when they want to meet with so and so, but I think having to have a security pass is very, very extreme. For Members of the Legislative Assembly to have to have a security pass to tour or meet with somebody in a Crown agency of the government doesn't sound right to me. Who's in charge? Is it the Workers' Compensation Board or is it the minister? There has to be that proper pecking order and that proper channel of respect.

The appeal time was touched on, and I would hope the appeal time is going to be corrected. Reference was made to appeals being shortened to a 30-day period of time. I think that would be excellent, because some of them have dragged on for months. But there are still cases out there that are dragging on. There is still the backlog out there. The backlog has been reduced but has to be brought down to a reasonable level.

I do have a problem, Mr. Chairman, with the question of the advocate serving two masters, serving the client and also serving the Workers' Compensation Board. I think that can be very, very, difficult for that person placed in that position, and that's where I maintain that an organization like the Worker's Health Centre could be so beneficial. I've found the Worker's Health Centre to be an extremely good service, an extremely beneficial service to injured workers. To me it's a shame they've simply become a referral agency, and I would hope the minister would open up communications. If they've faulted somehow in not pursuing funding, I would hope that doesn't close the door on them and that the minister will encourage further communication and in fact look at the concept of having the Worker's Health Centre responsible for these advocates or having the advocates responsible to an organization like the Worker's Health Centre.

Just to touch briefly on the Millard report, one of the things stressed in there – and the minister did touch on it briefly – is the emphasis on getting people back to work and recognizing that compensation should be based on loss of earnings. At the present time you'll have a situation where somebody may have a 20 percent disability, they're compensated on the basis of a 20 percent disability, but in actuality their disability prevents them from going back to normal employment. They end up getting a job where the compensation or the pay is only 60 percent of what they would have made in their former occupation, so in effect their loss of earnings is 40 percent even though they're being compensated 20 percent. Of course there's the other situation where an injured worker will receive compensation, turn around, get retrained, and possibly end up with a salary equivalent to, let's say, 140 percent of their previous earnings. So there are the two extremes, but those in particular that I'm concerned about are those that do have just a partial disability and are compensated on a partial basis but receive a much greater loss of earnings.

There was a reference made – and if the minister wants, I'll distribute it – to a tendering disagreement, and I would hope the minister would respond to that. It was in the Eddie Keen column this morning. I would hope everything appears the way workers' compensation people have said it appears.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to point out a few stats on workers' compensation. During the 1980s more than 1,000 Albertans died in the workplace, and the direct bill for workplace injuries topped more than \$2 billion in that entire decade. The cost of assessments is extremely high to employers. Work-related injuries will hit a figure this year of \$430 million, with the WCB carrying a deficit of \$367 million. I think this emphasizes the need – and I know there is a partial direction there – for preventative measures to reduce the number of injuries and for the Workers' Compensation Board to work very, very closely with agencies like the council that advises on occupational health and safety to enhance further education and prevention in the workplace.

I want to talk a bit on occupational health, Mr. Chairman. I think we're experiencing more and more a new trend or an area that was not covered in the past, and that's injuries that aren't

so clear cut, injuries where a person may not lose a leg, may not lose an arm, may not lose a couple of fingers, whatever the case may be, but are much more difficult to define; for example, injuries related to the back, to repetitive motion, to lead poisoning or gas poisoning, to the most simple of tasks, like the cashiers at Safeway who have to stand for hours. In the province of Quebec they're required by legislation to have a place to sit, because it's been recognized that that type of repetitive motion or simply standing can contribute to back injuries. That becomes a very, very difficult one to address, but I believe it has to be addressed. I think we're going to see more and more injuries occur in the forest industry as forest industry expansion occurs, if it does occur, within this province. I believe that's something we have to be prepared for.

Another area, Mr. Chairman, which until recently very, very little reference was made to, is the so-called sick-building label that's been used where one's workplace or one's environment contributes to occupational diseases. I'm still convinced myself that the Legislature Annex falls into that category of being a sick building, and possibly that explains the behaviour of some of the members that occupy that particular building.

AN HON. MEMBER: Especially the second floor.

MR. WICKMAN: It's not the second floor I was referring to.

Mr. Chairman, we've asked the department of public works to address that. It may seem like a very insignificant matter, but if it does start affecting the health of employees . . . That's just one example. Those types of situations should be monitored immediately.

One of the areas that I believe occupational health stumbled on – at least the perception is there very, very clearly that there wasn't sufficient enforcement, there wasn't sufficient communication, there weren't sufficient attempts to ensure that proper measures were being taken in the workplace – is the question of the Medicine Hat battery recycling plant. I think that pointed out very, very clearly that there is a need to step up the monitoring, step up the enforcement, step up the need for employers to be aware that they do have to monitor.

A few stats now – if the minister in his response could address a number of concerns in occupational safety dealing specifically with the number of inspectors. I'd like the minister to respond to the number of inspectors there are within the department actively, let's say, in the workplace or out in the field as compared to using a figure of five years ago. I'd like to know how much communication there is with outside agencies, how much dependency there is on Occupational Health and Safety in trying to communicate or ensure that safety in the workplace is being done by volunteer agencies and that the trend toward volunteer agencies isn't going overboard, that more and more the department loses control of occupational health and safety and preventative matters on this basis.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to take the minister up on his challenge and begin to actively invite those workers that feel they haven't been served fairly by the Workers' Compensation Board to complete a form. I intend to monitor the response of those persons . . . [interjection] Because, Mr. Chairman, the minister has to realize there are a lot of outstanding ones, files that have been open for a number of years where those people simply are not satisfied. They feel they haven't gotten a fair hearing. And some of them have not had the opportunity up to now to meet with the minister, possibly because they haven't asked for the opportunity to meet with the

minister, possibly because they feel meeting with the minister or asking to meet with the minister isn't going to be of any benefit and they're going to be met with a closed door. But because the minister has indicated it's an open door, I'm going to accept the challenge and refer some of these very, very difficult ones directly to his office.

Mr. Chairman, to conclude, I look forward to the response from the minister.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to speak to votes 12 and 13, to a minister that I think is doing a very fine job. I was moved today because of the fact that I've been involved as an employer and an employee, as well as having worked with the Department of Agriculture, in farm safety. Then having listened to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods – actually practising what he preaches. He talks about recycling. Well, he certainly did that today again. I think that's the third time this session we've heard both of his thoughts.

Mr. Chairman, I certainly want to commend the minister in the way he is getting the idea of safety out in the workplace. I think the way we can get our accident rate down is to have the worker become very familiar with safety practices, have the employers practise runs on safety and continually talk about safety in the workplace. I simply do not agree with our socialist friends across the way that having the big hammer and a bunch of people running around and the army out there checking to see that everybody is doing everything in the regulations is the way that you bring down the accident rate. I mean, when you're watching what happens in the states that are socialist, what's happening in those states nowadays, I'm really surprised that you continue to advocate that type of state. As a matter of fact, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about putting stress as a thing that could be covered by workers' compensation. I realize we are paying into workers' compensation, so I couldn't help but think that it becomes very stressful on this side of the House listening to those kinds of ideas that we're going to have a totalitarian state. Very stressful. I hope the minister isn't budgeting for us to go on compensation for that.

Anyway, under Occupational Health and Safety, I have become quite familiar with what a number of the companies in my constituency are doing. Just the other evening we had the occasion to meet with Shell Canada, people who are working with very dangerous gas, working with a lot of equipment, in what would normally be a high-risk area, yet their safety record is very good. Of course there are going to be accidents. There are going to be times when, human nature being what it is, we'll have shortcuts sometimes taken that shouldn't be. We'll have carelessness in other ways. At times we'll have fatigue that takes its toll. Those things are going to happen; we know that. But I think the attitude of this minister and his department, where we are promoting safety, where we are educating the people, is going to really start to show results in the very near future.

There's been criticism of the budget being decreased or not increased enough. Well, I believe that through education we can get the employer to really practise a lot of safety, and that will show far greater dividends than increasing the budget and having a bunch of people running around out in the field telling them what to do.

Turning over to workers' compensation, yes, I too have had many cases of people that have had problems. Some of them we've been able to help quite substantially; for others there are problems out there. I would make a suggestion to the minister that when a worker first comes in, I think they should get in writing exactly the steps, exactly what's going to happen. There seems to be such a misunderstanding. I'm not sure whether it's never explained completely, or if people aren't hearing when they first come in, or just exactly what's the problem, but many times we don't seem to have an understanding of the exact process and how it's going to work and the time frame and all this type of thing. So I think if it was in writing it would help.

Another thing that's been brought to my attention: the cheques that are sent out apparently don't have a stub. I've had some complaints that unless we write it down, we don't keep track. I think that's rather a minor one, but in any case it's something maybe we should be looking at.

One of the things I'm very pleased about is the new direction that's being taken with the worker where a caseworker is assigned to the injured person and will be following that person through. I have found that the injured worker has had some difficulty understanding why they get different people, why it takes so long to get answers. I believe this system will assist the worker a great deal, and we probably won't have as much trouble with that in the future.

I'm also very pleased that the department is seeing fit to spend considerable money on a system that will allow the files to be more readily available and to be able to access those on a much quicker basis.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud made a number of what I thought were very good comments and suggestions, and I am very pleased to hear that. I too was very pleased with what happened when we visited the rehab centre. I think it was a very educational process, and I came away from there with real confidence that, yes, this minister and his department are trying to help the injured workers in the province and they will get them back in the work force. One of the concerns that I have - I know it would maybe cost us some money, but I think maybe we should be looking very seriously at the problem we've got where a worker cannot go back to the same pay level he had before. Maybe we could get them back in the work force at a different pay scale, a different type of job, quicker if we were prepared to contribute a little more to the wage loss part of the equation. I think that as we move through and see the need for more training of tradespeople, possibly we could in many cases step up the retraining, refocus these people, and get them back in the work force a little quicker as well.

Now, I know that the minister wants to answer a number of the questions that were asked today. I have one question that I wanted to ask him. Back on March 12, I believe it was, the minister invited a number of workers in, had a meeting with them. I would like to know what he told those workers at that meeting and what's been the follow-up to that meeting?

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister of Occupational Health and Safety, followed by Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Firstly, the gentleman in the gallery, from Duffield I guess, is not the same gentleman from Duffield whom I talked to, once I'd seen his face. I'm sorry that he had to respond the way he did, because the gentleman I talked to - I thought we were referring

to the same one, that it was the same person, but when I saw the gentleman's face, he's not the same one. Maybe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods would get that gentleman in to see me so we could have a little chat in regards to what's there and what isn't there. The comments I was making were to another worker with the same concern about welding, where he did go to his union shop and the document was there but he had a hard time getting it.

I'd like to start back with the Member for Rocky Mountain House. He spells it out just right on when he says you have to educate the worker and the employer, and we have to talk safety in the workplace. There's no other way you can reduce it. If you all look at this little article, it couldn't have said it better: "You probably thought safety was someone else's job. Well, it isn't. Safety is everyone's job." Now, if we look at that, that pretty well tells it. It's your job and it's my job, and we'll have to work together as a team to do it.

Stress. Now, both members mentioned stress. How do you put stress into compensation? The members for Edmonton-Whitemud and Rocky Mountain House, how would you define stress and have it compensable? I'm not sure. I suppose what I'm going to do is make sure the *Hansard* of today will be available to the new board of directors. They're the ones who have set policy. They're the ones who will come back with the recommendations to change the Act, if the Act needs changing, because it's a new system. What we've done in the past: the Act was responded to by the minister in the Legislature. That is all being changed. That'll be done now by the recommendations of the Workers' Compensation Board.

There's another concern that's bothered me, and we're changing it. When you as an injured worker make an application for workers' compensation benefits, nobody seems to tell you what steps it has to go through or what steps you have to follow to get to where you want to go. That we want to change and make sure that the worker is advised. When the application is received, they should receive a letter saying that it will take steps 1, 2, 3, and 4, and you'll be hearing from us within so many days. We've got to do that, because if you don't do that, it's frustrating as all get out. And the worker is really concerned, because in many cases they have a loss of income, they have a family, and they don't know what to do. So we're going to make sure those changes are there.

They say to move quicker with the wage loss program. I want to advise both members that the wage loss recommendations of the Millard report are before the board now. I'll be looking forward to their recommendations in regards to that.

The last comment that was made here was: what took place on March 12? On March 12 I met with about, I believe it was, 35 or 40 people with concerns about workers' compensation. We met with a number of them. We had Mr. Millard there. Then a number of them came to my office and wanted to meet with me privately, which we did. To assure the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, my office door is open. If there's anybody out there who can't get results through the proper channels, I'd like to hear from them. Like I said, my commitment is that they'll be heard. Whether I can help them or not, I'll see that we can direct them through the proper course. We talked to these people on March 12 and we took their concerns. Every one of those people has received or should have received a response about where their file is at or, if they have a legitimate concern, what process it's in, whether it's at the Appeals Commission or whatever step it's in. They'll be notified. I'm

sure the gentlemen that you and I met with, of course, should have the same results back.

In responding to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, he says that some people won't be happy with a \$40,000 ceiling. Well, let me suggest to all members that there are very few people in that category, who receive compensation at the \$40,000 level. But you must remember that that compensation payment is pretty substantial, because you get 90 percent of net tax free. So when you figure that out, it's a pretty good income. Sure, it's not \$40,000 or \$50,000 that they make, but 90 percent of net tax free on \$40,000 is a pretty good income.

The temporary pension that the hon. member talked about: yes, that's one of the things that is not in the Act. I've asked the board to look at it. I would hope that if we don't put it in the changes to the Bill at this sitting, they would bring a recommendation back to us and we would change it in the future so that those with a temporary pension will get the increase along with the others. So it's forwarded to the Workers' Compensation Board now for review, and I expect to hear back from them.

Another thing that should happen on an annual basis is the pension increase. I thought I made it quite clear that after the amendment to the Act this year, it will not be necessary for the Legislature to increase the pensions. It'll be done automatically by the board with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. So it'll be their recommendations, and we'll have to take whatever they think is appropriate.

I want to say again to all that it is true – it's not false – that this minister has an open-door policy, and I believe that with every worker I've talked to, I've suggested they can pass that on. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud suggested something in a letter to me about a "bunker mentality" in regard to what was done there. Now, he got a response to that letter, and I thought it was quite clear why what was done there was being done. I don't want to raise the concerns so that we can get people excited, but there have been some uncomfortable moments for people working in that building. Now, I don't know if the hon. member would want to see something happen that shouldn't. I don't think what they've done there is unreasonable. I just hope that isn't what the hon. member is thinking about when he said, "Who's in charge?" Well, let me assure you that what was done there was done by the Workers' Compensation Board. The minister does not have that authority, and I was notified of what was happening because of the reasons it had to take place. When I visited that site, I was impressed with what they'd done. All you have to do is walk in and say you want to meet with so-and-so. Either the person comes down or you get a pass and go right up to whichever floor you want and the person is there to meet you. You don't have to go from the second floor to the third floor to find that person on your own, as happened in the past. So I think that's a super idea.

The mention was that the Appeals Commission serves two masters. Well, let me assure the hon. member that that's wrong. The Appeals Commission is independent. It serves the worker. There's a labour representative, a representative from industry, and a public representative. They do not answer to the Workers' Compensation Board; they respond to the claim as they see it with all the information before them from a doctor and any other information that can be provided. They act independently, and they are an independent Appeals Commission. The loss of earnings, as I mentioned, is before the board for further review, hopefully, as we move along through the process.

I said when I took responsibility for this organization that I would like to see most of Mr. Millard's recommendations implemented within a two-year period. We're into it 11 months, and I'm sure that by the end of two years much improvement will be there.

The article by Mr. Keen. Again I want to assure the hon. member that I've read it. The Workers' Compensation Board does their own decision-making in regards to what they purchase or what bidding process is done. Now, it's unfortunate that you have six firms bid and only one firm can receive the award so you have five firms unhappy. Or if you have seven firms bid, one receives the award and six are unhappy. In this case I'm not sure how many bid on that, but only one will be successful and the others will be unhappy. So to the hon. member: the Workers' Compensation Board makes that decision and not the minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about a sick building. I watched a program with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on TV, where somebody raised a concern: why are they spending so many dollars on building buildings and not giving that money to the workers? I hope he can recall what he said. He kind of agreed that we shouldn't be doing anything to buildings but giving that money to workers. Well, let me tell this Assembly that no matter what money is spent on improving buildings or putting in new buildings, not one cent is removed from the benefits of a worker. Not one cent is taken away from the benefits of a worker. So let's have that clear.

I can't answer the question on how many inspectors we had in Occupational Health and Safety five years ago, but that information we'll get back to you, sir, as we have today. I'm satisfied with the work force we have. Five years ago it was all in Edmonton, and you had to move out from Edmonton. Now it's regionalized. We have six regional offices, and we can be at a worksite within minutes, as was the case at Daishowa. And to the hon. member: he mentioned two deaths at Daishowa; I wish to correct it. There has only been one incident. Now, if he has something else that I'm not aware of, maybe he'd want to correct that.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that's covered all the questions from the Member for Rocky Mountain House and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. If I've missed any, as I've said, if I can't answer the questions here, *Hansard* will be provided to the Workers' Compensation Board personnel and I will ask them to respond to myself so I can get that message back to you people.

Mr. Chairman, I just got a note here suggesting that there has been a request made from the Worker's Health Centre and that that will be transmitted to the heritage grant committee for review. As I've said before, they have my support. If the recommendation comes back that they qualify and should get it, then that will be taken care of. So I wanted to put that on the record.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to get up and make a few comments on this particular department and votes 12 and 13. The minister's opening comments are pretty pat material, things we've heard from previous ministers, that they are concerned about safety and that safety/prevention is the key component in their department. I have no reason to

disagree with that, except, as I say, we've heard this on other occasions from other ministers and we seem to be getting the same kind of statement from this minister. I guess I can only conclude that he is serious, that he indeed is going to follow up within the province relative to injury and to workers, ensuring that safety/prevention is the key element in Occupational Health and Safety and that we can now rest assured that somehow the injuries are going to decrease and things will become quite pleasant in this province. I hope that's true.

Certainly I agree that education of both employers and employees is a major component in dealing with health and safety in our industries throughout the province. I notice that there is a decrease in the fatalities in the energy industry, the drilling industry. I'm not sure that we can give credit to the safety programs in this instance. There's actually been a very limited amount of activity in the oil industry. I think that in part is a contributing factor to the decrease in that industry, knowing also that the industry itself had taken up a task force and had attempted to find reasons and rationale and to deal with the problems.

But it just comes to mind that there was an article in the paper just the other day, a very unfortunate article, where an individual was working on a rig, had telephoned his parents, of course, said the job was going to kill him – it was an unsafe condition – was hitchhiking home, and unfortunately was hit by a vehicle and died. But the reason he was coming home and hitchhiking was the fact that he had left his place of employment with the rig company because he felt that the safety environment of that jobsite was not good, and he felt that he might well be killed on the job.

MR. TRYNCHY: Where was that?

MR. EWASIUK: It was a young fellow in Calgary who was hitchhiking from a worksite in central Alberta somewhere. It was an article in the paper, the *Edmonton Journal*, a couple of days ago.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Perhaps the two hon. members could meet at the end of session this afternoon and exchange that information.

Please proceed.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you. That leads me to the theory – the minister alluded to this in his comments – about the young people entering the work force. It is a very serious consideration that needs to be placed here, because indeed the young people are coming into the workplace generally inexperienced and unfamiliar with safety procedures and practices. I think, therefore, that it's incumbent upon the employer, particularly in this instance, to ensure that there is a proper safety orientation program within the plant, worksite, whatever it is, when they're dealing particularly with these young men and women. Many companies do that. I know that. But there are those that do not. I think it's particularly important that somewhere along the way young people entering the work force are given a proper safety orientation, and I believe that really does rest with the employer, in this instance particularly.

The minister made some reference that the labour organizations don't seem to co-operate or want to work relative to safety. I really challenge him on that particular statement because of my

own information, my knowledge. Organized labour in this province spends a great deal of time ensuring that their members are knowledgeable about safety practices relative to their particular trades. I know almost all the trades have a safety component within their organization to ensure that they do indeed teach and give the experience of safety to their members. So I know the labour movement is concerned about safety and works very closely with their membership.

I think what really needs to happen – and unfortunately, I'm sounding from a speech, something that I've said in previous years as well: my conviction that there needs to be safety committees on the worksites, and it has to be almost mandatory, Mr. Minister. I know at the moment there is a provision for that and at the moment it's not mandatory; it's on a voluntary basis. Again, good employers take advantage of that and indeed do have safety committees on the plantsite or on the worksite that encompass both the management and labour on site. They may share chairmanship positions, and they work very closely together to ensure that their work environment at that particular location is a safe one, and they do quite well. But there are those that do not. They guard with jealousy their right to manage, and they think that safety is their responsibility and really does not involve the employees. Well, it's those employers, I think, that someone needs to address to ensure that they follow those things up. So it seems to me that the need for safety committees, the involvement of both management and labour in talking about safety, has to be almost enforced, and there has to be a mandatory provision through some legislation to do that. Unless we do, there are those employers that will not accept that position, or they assume that responsibility and will not allow their employees to become part of a safety committee.

There are two other areas that I wanted to talk about in Occupational Health and Safety. Again, I raised something last year, and I wanted to ask the minister; he may be willing to respond: the long-term effect of people being exposed to toxic material and fumes. Now, some of these people worked on the worksite for a long, long time, 20 and in some cases as many as 30 years, and upon retirement or near retirement they become ill. They're convinced that it's because of the exposure they have had over these years to these fumes. It's very difficult, I guess, and doctors will not at this point make an all-out statement that, yes, this person's got a problem with his lungs or whatever because of his exposure. WCB will not accept that as a compensable injury or accident, and this individual generally falls through the holes. So there needs to be something done to address that particular situation.

The other thing I want to say quickly is that we're getting into a world of computers and the video display terminals. Again, I guess there are some arguments about whether they are hazardous or not. I take the position that they are. Again, are we going to be able down the road from now for people who develop diseases or other conditions as a result of being exposed to VDTs – will they be able to qualify for coverage under the compensation board?

Those are some of the questions I think perhaps the minister may want to address, perhaps not today but another time.

More specifically on the Workers' Compensation Board: yes indeed, '89 was a year of change I daresay. I'm not going to pat the back as the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House did, but I do think that there have been improvements within that particular department. I see and I feel some changes, no doubt about that. I am concerned, as the Member for Edmonton-Mill

Woods was, about the directors. I have no problem with the directors, whoever they are, but I was concerned that the minister chose not to select or at least even attempt to select the individual who was appointed by the Alberta Federation of Labour. The federation speaks for the labour movement in this province, and I think surely their nominee deserves consideration; in fact, I feel should have been appointed. The other question I have is the person who has been appointed as the injured worker. Again, no problem with that appointment, with the exception: who does he represent? Does he represent an injured workers' organization, or is he just an individual who happened to be available for the minister to appoint?

The other area that I want to talk quickly about workers' comp is the farming community. When are we going to do something about permitting - I guess they can, but making some effort to ensure that all farmers get covered by workers' compensation in light of the fact that many of the farmers are becoming large operations, a lot of equipment? They're not the family farm any longer, and I think it's incumbent upon the board and the government to ensure that farm workers are covered by the Workers' Compensation Board.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Excuse me, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt, but the Committee of Supply must rise and report progress.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee now rise, report progress, and request leave to sit again.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion of the Deputy Government House Leader, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Executive Council, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

MR. STEWART: By way of advice to the members of the Assembly, the Assembly will sit in Committee of Supply tomorrow evening, when the estimates of the Department of Agriculture will be under consideration.

[At 5:29 p.m. the House adjourned to Thursday at 2:30 p.m.]