

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Thursday, May 10, 1990 2:30 p.m.**

Date: 90/05/10

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

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

We give thanks to God for the rich heritage of this province as found in our people.

We pray that native-born Albertans and those who have come from other places may continue to work together to preserve and enlarge the precious heritage called Alberta.

Amen.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. ADAIR: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of this Legislative Assembly two of my colleagues and their assistants as well from the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The Hon. Albert Driedger – I'd ask him to stand – the Minister of Highways and Transportation for Manitoba and his special assistant Hollis Kinsey; and from Saskatchewan the Hon. Sherwin Petersen, Minister of Highways and Transportation, and the communications officer, Bob Coulter. I would ask that the members of this Legislature join in welcoming them to our Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism.

MR. MAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears we do have an invasion from the eastern prairies here today. I'd like to introduce some of my colleagues to the Legislative Assembly: the Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson, the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation in the province of Manitoba, and her executive assistant, Jackie Beaton; the Hon. Colin Maxwell, the Minister of Parks, Recreation and Culture in the province of Saskatchewan, and his executive assistant, Wade Luzny, who are here visiting and helping us today.

head: Notices of Motions

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As today is the last day under our Standing Orders for consideration of estimates, I rise to give notice that at the end of question period today I will move the following motion under the provisions of Standing Order 40.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Standing Order 58(1), which limits consideration of the annual budget estimates in Committee of Supply to 25 sitting days, be waived to allow the committee sufficient opportunity to scrutinize and debate the proposed budgetary expenditures of each government department, the total of which exceeds \$12 billion for the fiscal year 1990-1991.

head: Introduction of Bills**Bill 20****Consumption Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 1990**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce the Consumption Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 1990, Bill 20.

This Bill is an omnibus Act which reflects changes in the Fuel Tax Act, the Hotel Room Tax Act, the Pari Mutuel Tax Act, and the Tobacco Tax Act to bring them into administrative co-ordination for purposes of ensuring the Acts are consistent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: That's the sales tax.

REV. ROBERTS: You have consumption, Dick?

MR. FOX: And you trust him?

MR. WICKMAN: What are we going for, 13 percent?

MR. CHUMIR: Euphemisms, Dick. Euphemisms.

MR. JOHNSTON: That's a good one.

MR. SPEAKER: All right; you're taxing my patience. [interjections] Surprise, surprise.

[Leave granted; Bill 20 read a first time]

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

Bill 243**An Act to Amend the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act**

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 243, An Act to Amend the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, would stop the provincial government from deducting Canada Pension Plan disability benefits from individuals who already live in poverty and are on the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.

[Leave granted; Bill 243 read a first time]

Bill 224**Water Transfer Control Act**

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 224, being the Water Transfer Control Act.

This Bill is to ensure that under the federal government's free trade agreement there is no danger that waters will be transferred out of any of Alberta's river basins.

[Leave granted; Bill 224 read a first time]

Bill 280
An Act to Amend the Members of the
Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act

MR. DOYLE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 280, An Act to Amend the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act.

This Act will prohibit double-dipping sitting members of this Legislature to draw government pensions while sitting as members of this Legislature, commonly known as the Trynchy/Bogle double-dipping pension Act.

MR. SPEAKER: No, no, hon. member; that's entirely uncalled for.

The Member for West Yellowhead has moved first reading of Bill 280, An Act to Amend the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act. Those members in favour of first reading, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will check the audio level with my speakers. Perhaps we could just double-check. I have a suspicion we might even have a division on first reading at this rate.

Those in favour of first reading, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: I wonder if members of the Members' Services Committee voted on this issue.

The Motion carries.

CLERK: Bill 280, An Act to Amend the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act, introduced by the hon. member Mr. Doyle, is now read a first time.

head: Introduction of Special Guests

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of students from across Alberta who are to participate in the Forum for Young Albertans. These students are in Edmonton this week to learn about our political process. I understand that they spent some time with you today and that other members of the Assembly have also spoken to them. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. They are accompanied by forum staff Blair Stoltz and Brian Tittmore. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 26 members of the Consort junior high school in my constituency. These students have traveled quite a distance to visit our Legislature and other high

points in the city. They are accompanied by parents Dorothy Samuel and Yvonne Isaman, teachers David Elmes and Rene Vandervlis, and bus driver Cleona Weiss. I would ask that they rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Lloydminster, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 57 students from Holy Rosary high school. They are accompanied by their teachers Ray Politeski and Tim Brochu. I would ask them to stand and please accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I'm pleased to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 52 grade 6 students from Central elementary school located in the town of Ponoka. They are accompanied by their teachers Marilyn Watson and Gordon Hickey, and parents Theresa Void, Lorna Rost, and Mr. Evans. They are seated in the members' and public galleries, and I would request that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MRS. B. LAING: Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery today is Mr. William Pollard, the Tuxis recipient of the 1989 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association bursary. Accompanying him is his wife, Nina. Would they please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in your gallery with their families today are Miss Shauna Gibbons and Miss Claudelle Seguin, both from my constituency, the Alberta Girls' Parliament co-winners of the 1989 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association bursary. Accompanying them is their guest Mrs. Marlene LaPierre from the Alberta Girls' Parliament. I would ask members of the Legislature to give them the customary greeting and congratulations for winning.

head: Oral Question Period

Public Service Strikes

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my first question to the Premier. This government's policies on labour relations, especially with its public employees, are the worst in Canada. First of all, we had the nurses forced out on strike, then it was the social workers who couldn't get any action on their concerns, and now it's corrections workers. Even this Premier must understand that we now have major problems with our public service. Now, it's hard to figure out this government's strategy unless it is to throw every public servant out of a job and into jail or both. I cannot believe that again government negotiators have been sent to yet another bargaining session with instructions to offer yet another study. This is precisely what's been done with local 3, the correctional officers. I say to this government that public employees are sick and tired of studies. Now, my question to the Premier: what's it going to take for this Premier to understand that studies are no substitute to solutions for public employees' legitimate issues?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. Solicitor General will want to respond with regards to correctional officers, but first let me say that the hon. Leader of the Opposition opens his questions with such false information. The vast majority of public service workers in this province negotiate and sign agreements and provide valued service to the people of Alberta – the vast majority – and the vast majority are not lawbreakers. Therefore, they pursue their work, they provide valued service to the people of Alberta, and in the vast majority of times they negotiate and agree to contracts satisfactory both to the government and to the workers.

Having said that, he has raised the new issue of the correctional officers, and I'd ask the Solicitor General to respond.

MR. SPEAKER: The Solicitor General.

MR. FOWLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the strategy of this government is obvious and has been obvious for many years. We want to deal openly and fairly with all the employees of this province and continually try to do so. In respect to the correctional officers, they came back to the table yesterday for a period of two hours and then walked away, walked away from an offer which was 5 percent this year, 5 percent next year – still walked away and, in fact, are demanding 20 percent over the two years. My responsibilities are in respect to the care and protection of the people within our facilities, in the prisons themselves, and also the protection and the best interests of Albertans. If the correctional officers choose to walk after two hours of negotiation, they cannot be prevented from doing so by us, but I assure you, Mr. Speaker and all members in this House, that the interests of Alberta will be protected. Those in our custody will be protected as well.

Thank you.

MR. MARTIN. Mr. Speaker, such nonsense. They can pound their desks in here, but people know what's happening. You know, the classic "Don fiddled while Alberta burned" is really happening right here in this province now.

Now, he wants to call names, lawbreakers and everything else. He knows that the full travesty is laws that people can't live with. That's the real tragedy in this. I want to say that the reason they're not negotiating is that they frankly don't trust this government, because they have a track record. I want to ask the Premier simply this: when is the Premier going to stop this deliberate – and I say "deliberate" – attempt to provoke labour unrest and give these employees something concrete instead of more studies and committees?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hardly can follow the hon. Leader of the Opposition's position. The government is negotiating with the various AUPE locals. In terms of the social workers, the government had an offer on the table that dealt with both the conditions of work: the payment and the caseload. Now, they were all there. There was some disagreement. Obviously, there always is; it's negotiation back and forth. Therefore, when there appeared to be a problem, the government offered mediation. Mediation was turned down, and, I think with bad advice, some social workers have taken the illegal action of an illegal strike.

I think, Mr. Speaker, they are valued employees; they provide a valued job here in Alberta. We say to them: return to your jobs. I have ordered the government negotiators to deal with this in a meaningful, constructive way, and they'll be able to

negotiate a good contract that they would want to have. So the hon. Leader of the Opposition is completely wrong with the assumptions that he states leading into his question.

MR. MARTIN: Well, thousands of Albertans are all wrong, and this Premier is always all right. Isn't that amazing? All these people are out striking because they enjoy it. That's what they want to do, Mr. Speaker. He knows full well that with the social workers they offered it without prejudice: another committee, Mr. Speaker. They have a record with this government, and that's the problem. I want to ask the Premier: when is he finally going to show some effective leadership instead of sitting there calling people lawbreakers and change these ridiculous 19th century labour laws before he alienates the entire public service for good?

MR. GETTY: I repeat again for the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, that the laws of the province of Alberta are made within this Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly makes the laws in the democratic way that has been passed down from the British parliamentary system. Frankly, I'd say that across the world most people believe that this is the best democratic system there is in the world, and that is how Alberta's laws are formed. Now, the hon. members may not like the fact that they get rejected by the people of Alberta. However, Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility, have been given that responsibility by the people of Alberta to create the laws for this Assembly to approve, which they have, and then, if I understand the hon. Leader of the Opposition, it's his point that you break laws you don't like. Now, being a member of this Assembly, I find that shocking. I'm appalled and outraged.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: This is a government that breaks the laws every time they feel like it with the polluters, Procter & Gamble and the rest of them. I'm shocked and outraged. But it doesn't surprise me, coming from the arrogance of this government. He wants to talk about labour laws, and he brought in closure every way. Some democracy.

Child Welfare Caseloads

MR. MARTIN: To the other minister – what's his name? – Family and Social Services over there. Now, the Minister of Family and Social Services . . . [interjections] Isn't that what his title is? Isn't that his title? Has he got a new title, Mr. Speaker? The Minister of Family and Social Services has been throwing numbers around to try and discredit social workers who are fighting to reduce caseloads. I want to tell this minister that there's no doubt in anybody's mind who the public believes, and it's not him; it's the caseworkers of Alberta.

Now, it's become abundantly clear that the minister has absolutely no idea what frontline workers are trying to cope with. Yesterday I was in Calgary. In the last 10 years the number of reports of neglected and sexually and physically abused children has doubled to over 1,200 a month in the Calgary region alone. Mr. Speaker, these children need protection, and nobody cares about them more than the social workers who have dedicated themselves to working in the child welfare system. Let's make that clear. My question is: when will the minister give up his campaign to discredit social workers,

forget about studies, and do something concrete to reduce caseloads?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, again they don't want to deal with the facts. They bring in distorted positions, they do everything they can to incite debate, they do everything they can to encourage strikers, whereas we on this side of the House aren't out there just distorting the facts; we're more interested in presenting the facts as they are. We've done that in a very frank and open way. We believe that it's important to do some research from time to time, again contradictory to their position; they like to just jump in and respond and not think the process through or not look at all the options that might be available.

Mr. Speaker, I've said all along that I recognize that there are situations in this province where caseloads are higher than they should be. But what I presented to this Assembly are factual reports on what the provincewide situation is like – totally factual, Mr. Speaker, not numbers that I've made up but numbers that have been provided, and through a sworn affidavit, I might add. I've said that on a provincewide basis we have statistics that are in line with other provinces. We have statistics that are in line with the Child Welfare League of America. But again, it doesn't mean to say that there aren't situations that need to be addressed. We're anxious to do that. We are anxious to get on with some solutions. We are anxious to see an end to illegal strikes. We are anxious to see social workers back at the negotiating table, because if they are, Mr. Speaker, we can resolve these issues. But we can't do it through the methods this member wants to use.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, the only thing totally factual about this member is the fact that he's incompetent. That's what the social workers are saying. That's the totally factual thing.

He wants figures, Mr. Speaker. He should go out and talk to people. In the child welfare office that carries out all the investigations for Calgary, before the strike there was a backlog of 80 cases. Finally, the caseworkers got so frustrated, they walked off. The minister's creative calculations and baffling averages mean nothing to these workers, and his numbers sure aren't doing anything for the children who need protection. There were 80 there. Now, I want this minister to answer this question: can't the minister see that his meaningless number games aren't going to help the children in Calgary or Alberta but reducing caseloads will?

MR. OLDRING: This member finally takes the time to go out and talk to social workers when they're on the picket lines. Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't wait until then. I took the initiative prior to those kinds of things happening. I took the initiative and I went out and talked with frontline caseworkers from every office in this province, and I talked to them in a calm and reasoned fashion. We discussed high caseloads in some of the offices. We discussed together some of the solutions. We discussed together some of the things that we could do to address caseload. I've started to implement some of those recommendations, Mr. Speaker. We're prepared to continue to work on that basis. But again I can't say it enough: we can't resolve the issue . . . It's particularly regrettable when we're talking about a minority, and I know that member knows something about minorities. But we're now talking about a minority number of social workers that are now holding back real, meaningful progress for those social workers that are at the

jobsite trying to provide those essential services. That's regrettable, because I want to be able to work with those workers, and there are some illegal strikers that are preventing that from happening.

MR. MARTIN: The only thing regrettable is this minister and this government, Mr. Speaker. That's what's regrettable.

Mr. Speaker, this minister, your system is in an absolute disaster – absolute disaster – right now, and it's time, frankly, that you opened your eyes and saw what's really going on. My question has to do with the 80. Remember, I just mentioned they had 80 there. That means they have to spend hours in court. They face mountains of paperwork for each case. My question is to the minister. Surely he, even he, must understand that that's an impossible situation, with the backlog of 80 just in Calgary. I want to again ask this minister: how can he justify his offer of another study instead of protecting these children now by reducing caseloads?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has spent an awful long time in opposition, and you can see that the long, long time he's spent in opposition is starting to frustrate him, and those frustrations are being exemplified in his actions here today.

Again I want to reiterate that we have taken a number of initiatives to address caseload in the short time that I've been in this office, that we did put on the negotiating table a reasonable solution to addressing caseloads. Again, the stumbling block isn't in this government at this time. The stumbling block is a minority group of social workers that are determined to break the law, and it's regrettable, Mr. Speaker, because we're anxious to be at the negotiating table. We're anxious to continue to provide long-term, meaningful solutions. The majority of social workers agree with that process, and that's why they're at the jobsite.

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Liberal Party, Edmonton-Glenarry; followed by Highwood.

Social Workers' Strike

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me ridiculous to argue about a minority when the majority in fact are out striking. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Let's get on to the question. [interjection] Order.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, social workers are in a four-way bind. They have a problem with caseload overwork. They have a law that prohibits them from striking and that even prohibits them from arbitrating the issue of overload. They have an injunction forcing them back to work, and now they have the Minister of Labour wielding a big stick against them individually and against the union. Today we have more public service employees going out on strike which I think proves the case that this government has lost the control, lost its relationship with government employees. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, I think it is a given that the workers have lost faith with the minister responsible for social services, and they've lost faith with the Minister of Labour. They need a sign of some sort of sincerity on this issue. Is the Premier prepared to commit to a guarantee that all of the workers who return within a reasonable

period of time – no workers will be subjected to any kind of criminal or civil activity, nor will the union?

MR. GETTY: First of all, Mr. Speaker, again the Leader of the Liberal Party has commenced his questions with false statements. The majority of the workers are not out on strike. The vast majority of public service employees are working, are negotiating, and are able to strike agreements through negotiation – the vast majority. So let's not start questions with false information.

Then he switched to a hypothetical situation and said: given a hypothetical situation, will you guarantee something? Obviously, Mr. Speaker, that's impossible to deal with. I'll only repeat what I said before though. We consider these workers valued employees and they do very effective work in this province. We want to negotiate with them in the matter of the caseload, salaries, working conditions. We want to put in place mediation. We want to put in place balanced opportunities to solve the problems. Now, it's completely in their hands that they just return to their jobs, come back to the negotiating table, and as I have assured them, I've given orders to the government's negotiators to work with them to a satisfactory agreement. Now, compare that with being out as a minority breaking the law. It seems to me their action is clear, and I don't know why the members of the opposition would condone some other course of action. It seems to me they would be urging them to go back to work and negotiate.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, they won't go back because they're threatened with an archaic law and they're now threatened with an injunction.

My second question to the Premier is this. Quite incredibly we're in the midst of debating the estimates, the budget of the government. That budget calls for a 3.2 percent reduction in resources given to the child welfare investigative area, so we're adding a problem to a problem that already exists in terms of overload. Will the Premier commit to restoring the budget at least to its previous level so that you don't add a problem to the problem of overload?

MR. GETTY: Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again is coming up with false information. Now, he's got to get better research. As already has been pointed out by the Minister of Family and Social Services, over the period of time he has been working on this matter, we've had caseloads dropping by 10 percent in Calgary, by some 4 percent in Edmonton, and on an average across the province dropping. Not rising. Dropping. What would the hon. member do? While you have less people on the caseload, increase the dollars? Now, how does that make sense? Surely he must have raised this in the estimate discussions and been able to debate it and hardly needs to fall back on it now in the question period.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, yesterday a social worker informed me that she cried when she was faced with the court injunction order, cried because she still couldn't force herself to go back to work and work in an overload situation. It seems to me that our Premier is a caring man. He looked in on the Lubicon issue; he looked in on the nurses issue; he looked in on Gainers. Will he show that same sort of caring by meeting with one or two social workers to find out what the problem of overload is all about? Will you do that, Mr. Premier?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I get to agree with the hon. leader of the Liberal Party that I do care. I care about this province. I care about the social workers, and I care about the people they help. But I also care about our system of law and order. I know that Albertans would say to me: "If people break the law, should that give them an advantage in our province? And, Mr. Premier, if you want breaking the law to create an advantage for you, you are going exactly opposite to the system of law and order which we believe in and this Legislative Assembly believes in." So, Mr. Speaker, there is a clear way to solve this and there's a clear way to dry the tears in the eyes of the person the member is talking about, and that is to follow up on what I've said today, come back to your jobs. The orders have been given to our negotiating team; the opportunity is there. I believe in a very short period of time a solution and an agreement would be reached. So there it is, and I think it's fair.

Lottery Funds

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the minister responsible for lotteries, and I'll make my case brief. It's come to my attention that the country and western singer k.d. lang has received lottery dollars. Now, is the minister responsible for lotteries prepared to confirm or deny this?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, annually in the province of Alberta the province distributes over \$100 million to some 20 different foundations or agencies that in fact act on behalf of the government, ensuring they disburse some of those dollars, and the hon. Member for Highwood says it has come to his attention. Well, it wasn't very many years ago that the country and western singer k. d. lang was simply a young lady growing up in Consort in east-central Alberta, unknown to the people of Alberta, unknown to the people of Canada, unknown to the people of the world, and she applied to the Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts, one of these 20 or so foundations we help through the lottery fund. The foundation gets \$2.25 million per year, and k.d. lang was provided with a grant in the fiscal year 1984-85 of \$5,000 to undertake a tour of Canada. It proved to be very successful. In the 1985-86 fiscal year she applied again to the Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts. She was awarded a \$5,000 grant. She undertook a tour of New York. Today, in 1990, k.d. lang is known not only in Alberta, not only in Canada, not only in North America but the world as an outstanding example of vitality, the enthusiasm and commitment of this government to helping its youth to aspire for excellence in the world.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is again to the minister responsible for lotteries. Further information has come to my attention, and I wonder whether or not lottery dollars have been provided to the world figure skating champion, Kurt Browning.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, to repeat, our objective through the lottery fund is to improve family community life, to provide encouragement to the people of Alberta to aspire to a search of excellence and be known not only in Alberta, Canada, but the world. Kurt Browning applied for assistance through the Alberta Sport Council, a foundation that receives \$9.1 million a year in funding from the province.

I received \$1,200 to assist his training. We all know that in 1989 Kurt Browning shocked the figure skating world by becoming the men's world figure skating champion and in 1990, for the second year in a row, became the men's world figure skating champion. Kurt Browning's an Albertan from Caroline, a little community on the Eastern Slopes. Albertans can aspire to be the best in the world. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Welcome back to the House, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Corrections Employees' Strike

MR. WRIGHT: Mr. Speaker, perhaps we can get back to the . . . [applause] Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members.

Perhaps we can get back to the questions of the day, which is what question period is supposed to be about. My question is to the Solicitor General and concerns the correctional officers. The correctional officers, as we all know, are currently withdrawing their services in some of the correctional institutions in this province. They are not the first people to want to do that sort of thing, Mr. Speaker. They are very responsible people, and something really quite serious must have occurred for them to take this step. What, of course, has occurred is that they are faced with a prospect of compulsory arbitration under the provisions of the government employees' labour relations Act, and they have seen provisions of that Act which remove from the table some of the most important things employees can wish to bargain about. In particular, I refer to organization of work, assignment of duties, and pensions. These are some of the very things these correctional workers wish to bargain about. At the same time . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Question, hon. member.

MR. WRIGHT: Yes. My question, then, is this. Given, Mr. Speaker, that at the same time there is no meaningful bargaining on these points going ahead and there wasn't on Tuesday when they met, will the Solicitor General commit to this House that this government will in fact bargain in good faith with the correctional workers on all the matters that affect their job?

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, my understanding was . . . Maybe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has more information than I have of what the issues on the table were, but I thought they were salaries and pensions. The salaries: we offered a 10 percent increase over two years. The pensions have not been bargained. However, let me say this. It may be an opportunity to look at government pensions, because if, in fact, these correctional officers in the Solicitor General's department want a pension plan which is the same as the police or the same as some of the eastern provinces and are willing to pay 32 percent of payroll for it, maybe we should be talking to them about it.

MR. WRIGHT: But, Mr. Speaker, the pensions that were on the table were not to negotiate with the negotiating committee on them but simply to form a joint committee to review the local's concerns. That's quite different. So I ask this minister – a very able minister, in my respectful submission, nonetheless – to tell us why it should be the case that they have no problem with making 64-year-old guards responsible for the control of 19-

year-old inmates and yet cannot talk about those conditions of work with this bargaining committee.

MR. FOWLER: I was wondering, Mr. Speaker, what review committee was being talked about when the hon. Leader of the Opposition raised the matter of another review. Well, it now appears it's a review that was asked for by the prison guards. I quite matter of factly wasn't aware of that. I will ascertain from my own department what the hang-up was in respect to these negotiations that caused the men to walk away from the table two hours after negotiations started yesterday and two hours after that advise us they were taking job action.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is most unusual, but you know it's a very large province. We have one group here who traveled six hours one way to get here and obviously need about the same time to get home. Could we revert very briefly to the Introduction of Special Guests? The time will be added on to question period.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Pincher Creek-Crowsnest.

head: Introduction of Special Guests (reversion)

MR. BRADLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to the Assembly today 17 members of the Rockyview Christian school from Pincher Creek. They left Pincher Creek at 4:30 this morning. They visited, the Edmonton AGT tower. They are here to see government in action. They are going over to the Space Sciences Centre, and then they're going back to Pincher Creek this evening, another six-hour trip. So I commend them for their interest and their effort. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period (continued)

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Meech Lake Accord

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. Our caucus has it on good authority that Premier Peterson will not agree to unbundling the Meech Lake accord to allow separate passage of parts requiring only seven provinces. Quebec has said that it won't agree to a sunset clause to the unanimity requirement for Senate reform. Meech Lake has about as much life as Monty Python's parrot, yet the Premier refuses to understand that if he wants Albertans to accept constitutional reform, they have to be consulted first. I'm wondering whether the Premier doesn't realize that Albertans deserve to hear more from him about the different options he's proposing on their behalf. What is he proposing these days?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned to the hon. member yesterday, these are very difficult negotiations. I'm not optimistic about the ability to pull the Premiers together, and I

cautioned him that this was not a particularly good time to try and get into some kind of scoring of political points one way or another. So I'm not going to take him up on a debate during the question period – rather, to repeat to him that we are trying to work together as leaders in Canada to come up with meaningful constitutional reform, because we feel, and certainly I and this government feel, so strongly that our country must be united and we must concentrate on those things that will pull us together so we will be a strong, great nation in the future, not concentrate on those things that pull us apart. Therefore, I can only say to him that Alberta will be working for the three principles I mentioned yesterday: a united Canada; stronger, equal provinces that won't be dictated to from the centre of the nation, as they were during the early 1980s; and that we will be able to make a breakthrough on Senate reform. That will guide us in the future.

I can't possibly get into the negotiations with the hon. member, as to what Premier Bourassa might do or what Premier Peterson might do.

MR. CHUMIR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we all want unity, but Meech is in trouble because 11 ministers made a decision behind closed doors and the people of Canada don't like it. I'm wondering whether the Premier would support establishing a constitutional convention whereby citizens of Canada would get together in order to establish the constitutional principles that would be acceptable to Canadians in the future.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the comment about "behind closed doors" is just one of those glib comments that have absolutely no fact behind them. We had leaders of this country, democratically elected leaders, 10 Premiers and the Prime Minister, work together starting in Edmonton in August of 1986, work together at innumerable meetings of officials, of ministers, of first ministers, work together for the betterment of Canada, to try and make sure we had the entire constitutional family together, to try and correct the errors of 1981. Now, we worked together and were able to come to an agreement which we felt would heal the constitutional problems. We then brought them back to this Assembly; we introduced them in the Assembly. We let it sit for six months – public documents all the time. Ministers and MLAs took them back to their constituents, had meetings, discussed it, came back again to this Legislature, had a full debate, and then had it unanimously passed in the Legislature of Alberta. Now, what could be more public than that?

To have the hon. member throw in some glib comment like that doesn't bring credit to him, doesn't help the constitutional problem we face, and I just urge him to in the future try and work together to build this country, not concentrate on these things that could pull us apart.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Motor Vehicle Licensing

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned the other evening during Committee of Supply's study of the Solicitor General's estimates, a number of Calgary MLAs are receiving increasingly hostile phone calls and inquiries with respect to long lineups and protracted service delays in motor vehicle licensing offices. I wonder if the Solicitor General is prepared today to indicate to

the Assembly what steps he might be taking to resolve what's becoming a very unpleasant matter in Calgary.

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, I indicated during estimates that there were a number of reasons for the difficulties in Calgary, and I further indicated that I wasn't satisfied to sit back on those reasons and say that was the whole fault. What we have in Calgary, of course, is a situation where in fact no private-sector issuers are involved. In greater Edmonton there are private-sector issuers involved in Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Leduc, Spruce Grove, which goes a great distance to relieve the pressure upon the motor vehicle division sector. I'm going to be looking into this and have issued instructions that this be looked into in Calgary for the possibility of utilizing private-sector businesses for issuing of motor vehicle licences.

MR. PAYNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly encouraged that the Solicitor General is taking a look at the problem. I'm wondering if he'd be prepared to commit to share with the Assembly prior to the conclusion of the current Legislative sitting what his specific intentions are with respect to that problem.

MR. FOWLER: I would be more than pleased to accept that request, Mr. Speaker, and would advise all members of the Assembly the steps we will be taking before adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Environmental Impact Assessments

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the government that rammed five pulp mill projects down the throats of people in Alberta with no public hearings, no independent review of the scientific evidence, no environmental impact assessment on the forestry. Yesterday I tabled a copy of the memorandum outlining an Alberta-led scheme to deprive all Canadians of their access to courts to protect their right to a healthy future. This government wants the right to make secret deals with big companies that pollute. The Premier said outside the House yesterday that it's only a memo – memos aren't policy. Well, I'd like to refer the Premier to the communiqué of the western Premiers, that kind of policy, where they said they

called on the federal government to take immediate action by amending the existing . . . EARP Guidelines Order as an interim measure to improve the process and restore certainty.

Assuming that the Premier reads these communiqués before he approves them as policy, will he now admit that the desire to "restore certainty" is a blatant effort to go back to the old ways where he cuts the deal at the expense of the environment and people have no say?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member consistently leads into his questions on the basis of false information. One of the most unbelievable was when he got into it yesterday with the so-called secret or leaked memo from some caring citizen, because what does that memo say? He says it is shutting people off from the courts. Now, he stood here to try and leave that impression that people were not being able to go to the courts on environmental matters. Here's what it said: "in order to

remove environmental policy from the courts." Now, never has it been the situation in Canada where courts make policy. Courts are there to interpret laws. It's true in the United States; they have a constitution and a system with their Supreme Court where it actually makes policy. But in Canada the courts interpret the laws. The policy is supposed to be developed and is developed within a government elected democratically by the people, not appointed to a court. That is what this was talking about. Now, the hon. member may be frustrated that he is bounced around from several governments where people have not supported them and so he's never in a position to have policy input. But let's remember: be accurate when you quote things, because he certainly distorted it yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McINNIS: Perhaps if the Premier's in the mood to read things, he can read paragraph one of the memo, which says: develop a strategic position regarding the proposed federal Environmental Assessment Act, and with respect to interim measures that need to be taken to remove environmental decision making from the courts.

Well, he wants the right to make all the decisions in his room in secret and take away the right of Albertans to be heard in a public hearing. I would like him to explain what type of environmental policy it is that allows five pulp projects to be rammed down people's throats in northern Alberta with no public hearings, no EIA on four of them . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. [interjections] Thank you.

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member never is in a position of government when he wants to send the decision-making a government is given the responsibility for to the courts. Now, one of the things the government has been able to do, and the hon. member doesn't agree with, is to make a dramatic diversification of our economy. We have a magnificent forest resource, with the best forest management procedures anywhere in Canada. We're able to take that resource, a renewable resource, and develop that resource, provide jobs for the people of Alberta, remove people from welfare, lower caseloads, allow young people to grow up and live and build their own homes, fulfill their aspirations and hopes. And this member predicted that we couldn't do it, that we couldn't diversify the economy . . . [interjections]

MR. MITCHELL: I'll start . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, no, you will not start and you will not rise until you are recognized. If the place quiets down, you probably will get into question period.
Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Stumpage Rates

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the mid-1970s this government dropped its stumpage rates – stumpage rates are the price they charge companies for buying our trees – from \$5 per cubic metre to 70 cents per cubic metre. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? After 15 years they are still charging the same 70 cents per cubic metre, despite the fact that timber prices have increased back to the levels which supported the original \$5 stumpage fee. To the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife: how can this minister continue to sell trees today for 1975 prices, or is he simply confirming what many of us have actually

suspected for an awfully long time, that this government is, in fact, truly living in the past in the worst possible way?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, there are none so blind as those who will not see. I have provided the information to the hon. members with respect to stumpage rates. Stumpage rates are looked at across this country, and each province deals with them in a different way. There are certain charges added to stumpage in Alberta that aren't added in other provinces. Examples are protection charges and other charges. To say that we are charging too low a stumpage rate is ridiculous, just the same as to say we're charging too high. Because if we were charging too low, Mr. Speaker, we could be countervailed for something like that. So our stumpage rates and our handling charges and the cost to the companies must be competitive, and they are.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, everything else is equal: In 1973 and 1974 they were charging the same extra charges, but stumpage rates were \$5 per cubic metre; today the same extra charges, but stumpage rates are 70 cents per cubic metre. Will this minister simply stop all that stuff and admit that in fact he is continuing to charge 70 cents per cubic metre despite the fact that that is costing Albertans as much as \$20 million last year alone which otherwise would have been raised if he'd been charging stumpage rates equivalent to those charged in 1973?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is totally inaccurate. We're not charging 70 cents. I don't know where he's getting his numbers from. I said that our rates here that are charged to the companies for the timber resource are competitive with other provinces, and we make sure of that. Also, on the pulp side the stumpage rates are indexed to the price of pulp, so we have taken all of that into account.

In addition to that, reforestation is a responsibility of the companies here, and that's a significant charge to them. Effective May 1 we added the new free to grow standard, which added an additional cost to the companies with respect to the costs of their wood. So, Mr. Speaker, we are adapting to changing times.

MR. MITCHELL: You haven't adapted since 1975.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Time for question period has expired, even for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

MR. SPEAKER: We have a request for Standing Order 40. Edmonton-Highlands.

Ms Barrett:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Standing Order 58(1), which limits consideration of the annual budget estimates in Committee of Supply to 25 sitting days, be waived to allow the committee sufficient opportunity to scrutinize and debate the proposed budgetary expenditures of each government department, the total of which exceeds \$12 billion for the fiscal year 1990-1991.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the urgency, as you will know and as will all members of the Assembly know, today will be the last day – in other words, the

25th day – for consideration of the government's proposed budget, and that includes all of its departments. That's an awful lot of money to be considered in relatively few days, Mr. Speaker. It looks to me like about half a billion dollars a day, on average, would be considered if you were to divide the amount of the budget into the amount of sitting days allowed for consideration of the estimates.

I understand that ordinarily any changes to Standing Orders would be the subject of negotiation between House leaders. That hasn't happened this year, and as far as I can see, there's no one to blame. One of these days we'll get as far as Standing Order 51; I think we're still in the teens or the early 20s on negotiations. But my point is this: I'm not asking for a new number of days to be set. What I'm asking for this year is that that standing order be waived so that we can see how long it would take to give proper debate and consideration to each of the departments that come up for consideration.

It seems to us, Mr. Speaker, that this is a reasonable request. This is the only day, of course, on which it can be made, this being the last day of estimates that are allowed under 58(1). It's a reasonable request. Let's try it out, see if we can get unanimous consent of the members, see how long it takes to get through estimates – probably not, you know, another year or anything – and then maybe we'd have the way to amending the Standing Orders for the future. Given the amount of money that is involved, given the number of MLAs who never get to speak, who never get to ask questions about the proposed expenditures, it seems to me a very reasonable request, and I do urge unanimous consent for this urgent motion.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 40, the request. Those willing to give unanimous consent, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion fails.

Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that all written questions appearing on the Order Paper except 278 . . .

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order on what, sir?

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, you weren't present in the House when the matter of the estimates of the Executive Council came up. I'm glad that the hon. Premier is here. It wasn't a commitment, but it was my understanding that the hon. Premier was going to pursue the issue of giving more time for discussion in that area, and I'm surprised that there's been no response and that the vote has refused to allow that to happen.

MR. GETTY: I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, that's a point of order. But if it's an appeal to something we discussed, I'm

happy to respond to it, and that is: I said I would talk to the government House leaders and deputy House leaders to see if there was a place where we might be able to discuss in some useful way Meech Lake and the Constitution reform process. There may be still. We don't know because you don't know how a House and how negotiations proceed. It doesn't appear in the estimates there are, and therefore they will go on. There are other ways that it might be done if it appears that it's useful and helpful to the House. I can't predict it.

MS BARRETT: Otherwise he'd accept closure.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The matter is not a point of order. It was an inquiry and information given. Thank you.

MR. McEACHERN: Can I speak to it now, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: No, hon. member. This was simply an inquiry. Thank you.

Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that all written questions appearing on the Order Paper except question 278 stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

278. Mr. Decore asked the government the following question:

- (1) What was the total cost of the advertisements placed in Alberta newspapers by the government which focused on the highlights of Budget '90?
- (2) How many Budget '90 advertisements did the government place in Alberta newspapers? In which newspapers did the government place Budget '90 advertisements?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, Question 278 is accepted by the government.

head: Motions for Returns

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that all motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper except 158, 159, 161, 162, 163, and 164 stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

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

[Debate adjourned April 26: Mr. Fox speaking]

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Clerk be so good as to tell me how much of my speaking time is left on this motion for a return?

AN HON. MEMBER: Take whatever you need.

MR. FOX: Thank you. Motion 158 on the Order Paper is the opposition's official request to the government this year for documents that we've been requesting for the last three years, Mr. Speaker. We're looking for copies of the master agreement made between this government and their good friend Peter Pocklington in respect to a \$55 million loan guarantee and a \$12 million loan given to Peter Pocklington, ostensibly to upgrade and expand the Gainers plant in Edmonton and to build a hog slaughter facility in southern Alberta, apparently at Picture Butte. We dealt with this at some length when debating this motion for a return sometime earlier, going through the litany of foul-ups and outlining the basic incompetence of this government in terms of its dealings with the red meat industry, and I think it's a very, very serious issue.

We've seen countless examples of the damage done to the pork industry in the province of Alberta through this government's secrecy and favouritism and nasty habit of making deals behind closed doors with their friends, deals which in almost every case have left the taxpayers of the province of Alberta on the hook for millions of dollars and deals which have done absolutely nothing to diversify the economy or secure the economic futures of either the farmers or the workers or the people in the province of Alberta. It's been a disastrous record by any account.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I tried in question period to discuss with the government the damage that these deals they've cut have done to the cattle industry as well. I think we're seeing evidence of that damage, and I relate it specifically to the Gainers plant in Edmonton. This Gainers plant in Edmonton that was supposed to have been upgraded, expanded, and modernized with the \$55 million loan guarantee provided to Peter Pocklington by the government is now being described as old, outdated, and likely in need of being shut down in the next few months by the new owners of Gainers, the Conservative Party of Alberta.

I submit that that is a shame, not only for the men and women who work at that plant and rely on the beef slaughter facility and the attendant processing there for jobs but for the cattle producers of northern Alberta who, when that slaughter line is closed for beef, will have no cattle slaughter facility north of the city of Red Deer. I think that's a very serious situation for the cattle producers of northern Alberta who have seen over time, I submit, a very deliberate strategy on the part of this government to move the cattle industry southward towards the U.S. border. The very existence of the Red Deer plant is in peril, too, by government actions, Mr. Speaker, and what we're likely to end up with is a cattle slaughter industry that's located entirely south of the Trans-Canada Highway in the province of Alberta, which is just unacceptable.

I was not impressed with the answers provided yesterday by the Minister of Agriculture who seems to say, "Well, we're still accepting cattle there, so what are you worried about, even though we're planning on closing it?" It's not a good idea to debate these things after they've already occurred. What we want the Provincial Treasurer to do is shock the world by standing up and laying on that table right there the master agreement and any amendments thereto covering these sleazy deals that they cut with Peter Pocklington several years ago, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Would the hon. member just watch the language a tad?

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I get worked up when I talk about this, because it's been a constant source of frustration for those of us in the opposition who have been trying on behalf of Albertans to get information on this important issue for the last two years, since March 3, 1988, when they stood up in this Assembly and announced that deals had been cut with Peter Pocklington and deliberately misled the people of Alberta about the . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, hold it. Hold it. That's twice you've been out of order. "Sleazy" is unparliamentary; "deliberately misled" is out of order as well.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, I don't notice interventions when the minister of economic development accuses me of deliberately misleading, deliberately distorting . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. Order, please. The Chair does not pretend to be infallible, by any stretch of the imagination. The Chair cannot catch everything. The Chair has caught these two, so don't complain about what hasn't been caught somewhere else. Please continue.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, if the term "deliberately misled" is unparliamentary, I'll withdraw it, but the onus is on . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. The term is out of order, not is it.

MR. FOX: I'll just withdraw it.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, but let's just do it without all the . . .

MR. FOX: Good. Then the onus is on . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, still.

Now let's go back to the way we ought to be doing it.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The onus, then, is on the Provincial Treasurer to tell the people of Alberta what happened with that money. What were they trying to tell the people of Alberta when they presented a document saying that the \$55 million loan guarantee was going to be used to upgrade and expand a plant in Edmonton, when he knew it was going to do nothing other than bail out Peter Pocklington's bad loans with the Lloyds Bank? Tell us what was intended with the \$12 million that they said was going to be used to build a plant in southern Alberta. They gave him \$6 million of that money, and he hadn't even bought a piece of land, Mr. Speaker. If the Provincial Treasurer would like to stand in his place and justify why he was telling us a year later that Pocklington was using that money to cover his general day-to-day operating expenses, then the onus is on them to tell the people of Alberta what they really meant when they told us in that press release that these things that didn't happen were going to happen. I think it's a very serious issue.

We've a good business, an important industry in the province of Alberta, an important enterprise operating on 66th Street in the city of Edmonton that is now saddled with a debt in excess of \$100 million due to the incompetence of this government. We've got a red meat industry whose future is constantly clouded and in doubt because this government refuses to make

any arrangements about the future of this industry through involving all of the players in the industry in the debate. They want to still keep making secret deals with their friends behind closed doors instead of involving in the debate the people who work at the plants – through their representatives, the unions – the cattle producers and hog producers in the province, and it's a shame.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Yes, just a couple of comments on this, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the government doesn't realize that by refusing to release this document, they continue to feed fuel to the idea that the reason for the \$55 million loan guarantee and the \$12 million loan package and probably the \$100 million loan out of the Treasury Branches to Peter Pocklington was because of the Gainers strike. When this government came into power, the Gainers strike was on. Here we are, four years later, and we're back in the same place with bad labour laws causing problems in this province.

Unless the government is willing to come clean and explain what's going on with those deals and show us the agreements, why shouldn't the people of Alberta consider that a secret deal was made and they bought Peter Pocklington off by offering him this kind of money? Now, it's put the taxpayers in hock; it's the taxpayers' money that's gone to this guy. We still don't know what's going to happen with the Palm thing. We do know that the government is totally responsible for Treasury Branches debts, and yet this government sits here and says: "Oh, no, nothing wrong. This kind of way of doing business is fine." Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not fine, and the people of Alberta know that. The only way the government is going to get off the hook is to come clean and start making documents like that available.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Additional?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Call for the question. Summation? Okay.

The hon. Member for Vegreville has moved Motion for a Return 158. Those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion fails.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung]

[Eight minutes having elapsed, the House divided]

For the motion:

Bruseker	Gibeault	Mitchell
Chumir	Hawkesworth	Mjolsness
Decore	Hewes	Roberts
Doyle	Laing, M.	Taylor
Ewasjuk	Martin	Wickman
Fox	McEachern	Woloshyn
Gagnon	McInnis	

Against the motion:

Adair	Gesell	Nelson
Black	Hyland	Osterman
Bogle	Johnston	Payne
Brassard	Jonson	Rostad
Calahasen	Klein	Severtson
Cardinal	Kowalski	Shrake
Clegg	Laing, B.	Speaker, R.
Dinning	Lund	Stewart
Drobot	Main	Tannas
Elliott	McClellan	Thurber
Evans	Mirosh	Trynchy
Fischer	Moore	Weiss
Fjordbotten	Musgrove	Zarusky
Fowler		

Totals: Ayes – 20 Noes – 40

[Motion lost]

159. Mr. Hawkesworth moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all agreements or contracts whereby the province of Alberta agreed to indemnify the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation from any obligation resulting from the restructuring of North West Trust Company and its amalgamation with Heritage Trust Company.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday in my estimates that as you look ahead to the number of motions for returns which are before us, a fairly extensive list, these motions for returns have generally two characteristics. One, we've seen them all before. They've been through the Assembly many times over the past two to three years and have been rejected by the government because of the debates and the reason given then. Secondly, there is a series of these motions for returns which in fact are flawed in their essence. [interjections]

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

MR. JOHNSTON: That is to say "flawed" because it's impossible to understand what the question is or they're sloppily drafted and put together so they can't be answered properly.

Now, we have taken the position with respect to this Motion 159, historically on August 10, 1989, that we would reject this motion. We have not changed our minds. We will reject this motion again for the same reasons that we explained to the Legislative Assembly on August 10, 1989. We will stand by that position that the kinds of agreements between two governments, in this case the CDIC as an agency for the federal government and the government of Alberta, are in fact confidential. We do not agree to exchange that kind of information. Moreover, the arrangement with respect to the way in which North West Trust negotiates its affairs with other entities is, in fact, privileged as well because of commercial confidentiality.

Now, I know I've got all the speeches from the members across the way, and I'll just check off the words they use again, because they obviously will use the same kind of debate because they're using the same kinds of questions, Mr. Speaker. I would hope that if we want to get to a meaningful disclosure – and the government wants to be able to provide information, get the data on the table, help the researchers of the opposition party do their job – we would be glad to assist. But, you know,

because the list is so long and because the time is so short and because the opposition wants to take so much time with votes and long debates and meaningless statements that are irrelevant, usually wrong, we have no choice but to take on the issues. That's why we're doing it.

Now, I know that the opposition is out there saying: "Well, they won't answer the questions. They won't give us the information. We need a freedom-of-information law." A freedom-of-information law so they can selectively look into the affairs of people they don't like; their own hit list. That's what is going to happen if you have the kind of legislation, the kind of information these people want.

Now, let's not have that misrepresentation. Let's not have the kinds of phony mistakes that were made last time in this debate, Mr. Speaker, where errors were prevalent, misstatements were clearly put forward, and let's at least get back to the issue. I'd be glad to deal with those motions for returns that are before me on a reasoned, considerate basis, provide debate and information where necessary, but again, because this one has been dealt with before, I'm asking my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to reject it one more time.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The problem with what the Treasurer just said is the same problem that usually occurs when a member from that side stands up. They claim that what we're saying in our statements we've made are wrong, yet it's funny that they don't have any facts or figures to refute any of the specific statements, just a general condemnation of saying, "They don't know what they're talking about," and thinking they can get away with that kind of stuff. Well, if some of the facts that we put on the table last time were wrong, why didn't you correct them? You didn't bother to correct one specific fact stated last time when this issue came before the House.

Now, it happens, Mr. Speaker, that we have talked about this general issue a number of times, so I'm going to stay fairly specifically to this topic. When the Treasurer took over the old North West Trust and the old Heritage Savings & Trust Company in the spring of 1987, he set up a new company called North West Trust. Now, in order to take them over, he got \$277 million from the federal government.

MR. JOHNSTON: A good deal.

MR. McEACHERN: Yes, it was a good deal. You're lucky the taxpayers of Canada bailed you out and helped you to cover up a mess that this government had made in lending over half a billion dollars out of the Treasury Branches to the old North West Trust Company, plus the problems of the Heritage Savings & Trust Company, most of whom – the major shareholders – were Conservative people that this government helped to set up that company.

Now, Mr. Speaker, part of the deal when they set this up – and we do know some of the things, but we would like to know exactly what the deal was, and we've never seen the document. The Treasurer put that \$277 million into the Treasury Branches immediately, and transferred \$212 million of it into Softco, which then turned around and gave the Treasury Branches \$153 million. He also put \$50 million into the new North West Trust to give it some seed money, some cash.

As well as that, he gave back \$15 million to CDIC – and that's the subject of this particular motion – as an indemnity. It was never really explained in the press release or any of the subsequent documents. We've been through the public accounts and those kinds of things and seen where the money was supposedly accounted for, but there's been no clear explanation of what that \$15 million bought. Now, I think what is clear from various documents I've seen is that CDIC said, having given that \$277 million, that they would not be responsible for any further debts of the old North West Trust and the old Heritage Savings & Trust Company. I think that much is clear.

But the question is: does a trust company, now the new North West Trust Company, qualify for CDIC coverage for its clients? It is normal for a trust company to be required to carry that kind of insurance with CDIC: up to \$60,000 per depositor in a trust company. What is not clear is when that kicks in. Did it kick in immediately the North West Trust Company was set up, or did the new North West Trust Company have to go through some kind of number of years of operation to show that it was viable before CDIC would agree to insure the depositors? So what we're asking for here is a perfectly reasonable thing. We want to know exactly what the terms of the indemnity were: why the \$15 million; what did it buy; what was it for?

One of the reasons the government often uses – and the Treasurer just alluded to it a minute ago, so I feel it's a fair thing to raise – is that we are, in asking these questions, often prying into private companies' affairs. Now, I think any private company that does business with the government deserves to have that information made public. If they're going to use tax dollars to be involved with a company, the taxpayers should know. But this deal doesn't even have that excuse. The \$15 million indemnity that we're talking about was a deal between this government and the government of Canada, again another public institution supported by the taxpayers of this country, and the people should have the right to know what's done with those dollars. So I don't think the Treasurer has a leg to stand on in saying that we shouldn't have this information. Just what did the \$15 million buy is what we would like to know.

The liability of the CDIC is obviously not there for the past mistakes of the old North West Trust and the old Heritage Savings & Trust Company. What we don't know is when it kicks in on the new North West Trust Company. That's the key thing that we'd like to know.

What we do know also, though, is that Softco has been set up to take the losses from the new North West Trust. So I suppose the indemnity could have something to do with Softco's mandate and their relationship to North West Trust. Although it's supposed to be totally separate and they're two separate entities, we do know that North West Trust, in fact, does the books for Softco. So there is a fairly direct relationship. We do know that the government put their friends in place in both those institutions, to run it, to keep things as quiet as possible, and to cover over the messes that had been made as much as possible.

So what we would like to know, then, is: what did the \$15 million buy? I don't see any reason in the world why the Treasurer shouldn't tell us.

[Motion lost]

161. Mr. Fox moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of audited financial statements for Sodor Foods Inc. for the fiscal years 1987 to 1989 inclusive

and a copy of the quarterly financial report for the period ended December 31, 1989.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to apologize to the Provincial Treasurer for my debate both on a previous motion for a return a couple of weeks ago in the Assembly and today being so intimidating that he was reluctant to rise and respond to some of the concerns I raised. He did feel the need to allude to the fact that perhaps I wasn't entirely accurate in some of the things I said but didn't take advantage of the opportunity to prove that. I perhaps would give him the opportunity to do so in the context of debate on this motion for a return, which, I might point out, Mr. Speaker, in spite of his claim that all of these motions for return have appeared again and again and again on the Order Paper, is a new one.

We're asking for the audited financial statements for Sodor Foods Inc. for the fiscal years 1987 to 1989 inclusive and a copy of the quarterly financial report for the period ended December 31, 1989.

Now, members on the government side who might not understand the relevance of the request for this particular piece of information need to be reminded that Sodor Foods is part of the Pocklington empire. It was one of the assets controlled by Gainers Inc. or Gainers Properties Inc. or whatever particular corporate entity Mr. Pocklington decided to . . .

MR. JOHNSTON: Three nine seven six oh six six one three nine two oh three two oh one one three two oh one.

MR. FOX: Could you be more specific, please?

AN HON. MEMBER: That's one of those lawyers' shell companies.

MR. FOX: That's right; one of the Karvellas shell companies. Anyway, Sodor Foods operating in Montreal, part of the Gainers empire.

Basically what we want to do or hope to be able to establish, hope to find out through these financial statements and their quarterly financial report, is just exactly what happened to the millions of dollars of Conservative government largess laid upon Mr. Peter Pocklington, because it's apparent, Mr. Speaker, that he didn't do what he was supposed to do with the money he was given. We'd like to find out what happened to the millions of taxpayers' dollars that the Provincial Treasurer and Premier shoveled into Peter Pocklington's bank accounts. What did he do with it? Where did it go? How did it get laundered through these various companies? Why did no good come of it? And Sodor Foods is certainly part of the puzzle, part of the riddles we're trying to solve, part of the paper trail we've been trying to follow. We want this information. We think it's relevant, public information. As well, we believe that the master agreement that nobody seems to have seen and that the government has steadfastly refused to table because I believe the information contained therein would sufficiently damage the reputation of some members of provincial cabinet – that they're not going to let it see the light of day through legal or other means. We believe that Mr. Pocklington violated the terms of the said master agreement in February of 1989 when he made some arrangements with respect to Sodor Foods in Montreal. The Provincial Treasurer claimed not to be aware of that until sometime in June, I guess. I don't recall all the dates. Perhaps he'll enlighten us.

Anyway, this request, I think, is a new one, is a reasonable one, and one which I'm sure the Provincial Treasurer will agree to.

MR; JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, as I look ahead, there are three requests here – 161, 163, 164, at least – and while I speak at this moment with respect to 161, some of the comments that I would make I'm afraid you're going to hear again because they will be just as applicable to 163 or 164. But I will make them now, Mr. Speaker, in the context of 161.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, let me say that during the period of '87 and '88 and for most of 1989, this company was not in the hands of the province of Alberta. This company was owned by the private sector, was operated independent of the government, and obviously what, again, we see here is a request for information selectively allowing these people to have private-sector information. Now, that just isn't appropriate in our minds, irrespective of the owner of the company, irrespective of the nature of the entity itself. There is the broader principle, and that is one which we have seen here in the Assembly time and time again: that the member is using the selective privilege of this Assembly. . .

MR. McEACHERN: If they get government money, it should be public.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. JOHNSTON: . . . to achieve information against the rights of the individual.

Now, these people over here are selective in their understanding and expression of protection of the rights of individuals. On one hand they say we are infringing the rights of various groups, taking away the rights to have freedom of expression, freedom of action, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But then they come right back themselves and fall into the same trap, a trap which takes away the rights of another individual by using the powers of this House to provide information. The first point, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be making that point again, as I have already.

But the second point, more fundamental and germane to the issue here, Mr. Speaker, is as you have pointed out from time to time and as I have advised the Assembly on many occasions: the province now is in litigation with the former owners and various other corporations which are attached to and associated with this company. Your warning has been clear, Mr. Speaker, that in fact if we are in litigation – and we are in litigation with several actions having been launched – those things that I may say may, in fact, influence the course of that litigation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would not want to be one that would abridge the rule of sub judice. I have listened and read your comments very carefully. I have read the authorities, both in our own Standing Orders, in *Beauchesne*, and other places, and I find that it is in fact sub judice with respect to this whole issue of Gainers, Gainers Inc., Gainers Properties, Sodor Foods, Kretschmar, Magic Pantry, and then a list of other companies which are now in the midst of litigation where, in fact, we are very careful about what kind of public positions we take because it would be used against us, and we have to be extremely careful as to how we plead in this case. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the province must turn this down because it is subject to sub judice rule.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will recognize Edmonton-Kingsway in a moment, please.

It's interesting that the Chair had already had an exchange of notes with the Table, initiated by the Chair, with respect to the sub judice convention. At the time the motions for returns were signed by myself, I raised the matter of a violation of sub judice convention. The answer came back that we would allow it to proceed, working on a theory that perhaps by this date, or whatever date the issue came forward, circumstances would have changed with regard to sub judice.

So some very careful comments by Edmonton-Kingsway, and then perhaps we had better get on with this issue. There's a real difficulty here that perhaps the Chair is going have to intervene and just completely invoke sub judice convention.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, just a couple of points, Mr. Speaker. The first one, this nonsense about seeking information about private companies. The government's been hiding behind that for a heck of a long time, and I suggest that you ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs what he's had to say about it in this Assembly many times when he was in opposition. He said that if the government puts money into a company, then that company should have to own up; that information should be public; it's taxpayers' dollars. He should be telling you that now that he's in your caucus. It's just nonsense that you should be able to hide behind that one.

As to hiding behind the sub judice rule, I do wish to raise that point. Unless the . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. The sub judice rule is there. It's a fact of reality. It's not a question of being able to hide when you apply the legitimate rules, the Standing Orders of this Assembly, or of *Beauchesne* or of *Erskine May*. So please make comment, but delete "hiding behind."

MR. McEACHERN: My point is that if the court case were actually, you know, going on right now, then I would certainly agree. But just because some paper has been filed . . . For instance, I'll give you an example. Mr. Conway of Softco has filed a suit against myself and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands and a number of reporters for supposedly maligning him. But that was before the last election, and all he was trying to do was shut us up during the election. Later, when the House sat, he sort of made more noises. So . . .

MR. JOHNSTON: Step outside, and say something.

MR. McEACHERN: We did. We've said all the same things outside and inside the House. Let him proceed. I would love to take him to court. We'd find out some of the things that are going on with your coverup about the whole North West Trust mess. So I would welcome him to get us into court. We'd find out whether he got a special deal or not, wouldn't we? And we'd find out whether some other people got the same deal or not.

So I just suggest to the Treasurer that unless the court case is actually going on, unless it's actually a trial, he is not able to say that we shouldn't be able to talk about it. He should be able to talk about it, too, although I would suggest that, yes, he should be careful what he says. But he should make the basic information we've asked for available. There's no reason in the world that because of some sub judice rule he can't release this document. The document doesn't prejudice anything in court.

The document is one that has information about taxpayers' dollars and the position this government got the taxpayers in this province into. There is no reason in the world that he shouldn't release that document.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the Provincial Treasurer that although I hear his words often repeated, I never find them boring. He always finds some interesting little wrinkle to add to the speeches that he recycles year after year after year when he tries to deny information. [interjection] I know none of his colleagues feel that way. I know that they're bored to tears; I know that they leave the Assembly often when he speaks. But I don't find them boring, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSTON: You could learn.

MR. FOX: That could change.

The specious argument he uses to deny access to information, trying to invoke some debate about the rights of individuals and how by seeking information the members of the opposition have no respect for the legitimate rights, for the privacy of individuals, I think is a foolish argument, Mr. Speaker. Because what we have here is a businessperson in the province of Alberta thoroughly discredited in the eyes of everyone except the Conservative government, a businessperson in the province of Alberta who came hat in hand to the provincial government and asked for public money. As incredible as it seems to all Albertans except those who are part of the Conservative government, they caved in and gave him public dollars, and a considerable number of them: a \$12 million loan, the promise of a \$4.4 million grant upon the completion of a plant that he had no intention of ever building, a \$55 million loan guarantee, a \$100 million line of credit, Palm Dairies. I mean, the list goes on and on and on. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that when that gentleman, that Conservative businessman, comes to the people of Alberta hat in hand and gets it filled to brimming with public dollars, then he gives up some of his rights. What he gives up is the right to hide from public view what he's doing with those dollars.

Now, I know that they didn't make any undertakings in terms of performance guarantees with Mr. Pocklington; they didn't negotiate a deal that would require of him certain things in return for the money given. I know that's the case, and for that I'm sorry. You know, it's left the taxpayers on the hook for hundreds of millions . . .

MR. JOHNSTON: Another mistake.

MR. FOX: Well, prove otherwise, hon. Treasurer. You've had ample opportunity long before any talk of the courts came into this issue. You've had ample opportunity.

In the beginning there was a deal, and we asked for some information. We wanted to know whether or not we had got any performance guarantees from Mr. Pocklington in exchange for public money, so that the people of Alberta could be assured that we're ponying up the cash, we're risking some of our money but in exchange we're going to get development, we're going to get diversification, we're going to get a stronger economy, and we're going to get jobs. We got none of those things, and I submit it's entirely reasonable and proper for us – not wanting

to invade the privacy or the rights of an individual, Mr. Speaker – to ask for the audited financial statements of a company that was propped up with public dollars, a company that may have been used by said businessman to launder public dollars so that the Gainers company could be left a carcass: a carcass over \$100 million in debt when he left the Conservative government holding the bag.

That's why we want the information. That's why the Provincial Treasurer should give it to us. That's why the members of his party are going to vote with us on this motion for a return.

MR. SPEAKER: A call for the question.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion lost]

162. On behalf of Mr. Hawkesworth, Mr. McEachern moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all agreements that indemnify North West Trust Company from any losses in the event any of the payment or performance obligations of 354713 Alberta Ltd., a company jointly owned by the province of Alberta and the Alberta Treasury Branches, are not paid or performed.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, we've just been through this debate, and I'm not going to bore the members of the Assembly. I take the advice from my colleague from Vegreville that he doesn't like my speeches, so I'll simply indicate that the government will not accept this question for all and many more reasons than expressed in 159, and I would encourage members to vote against this motion.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Kingsway, in summation.

MR. McEACHERN: The Treasurer fails to distinguish the two motions, which just shows the level of his understanding of his own portfolio. They're clearly two different questions, Mr. Speaker. In case he has any doubt, the 1988-89 public accounts has two paragraphs quite distinct from each other, the first one dealing with exactly the points raised in motion 159 . . .

MR. JOHNSTON: So you got the information,

MR. McEACHERN: As much information as we're able to get.

I would point out that the information just happens to be on page 1.10 of the public accounts in the notes to the public accounts. There's no formal accounting for these things; there's just a little note here giving us some information.

To get back to the difference between the two motions so that the Treasurer might understand his own departmental responsibilities a little better. One paragraph in here refers to the indemnity for the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation in that relationship. Now, it doesn't explain it fully, as I explained earlier. There are some problems with that still and some things we don't know, but it refers very clearly to the relationship between the Alberta government and the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation in regard to the takeover of the old North West Trust and the Heritage Savings & Trust Company and being amalgamated into a new North West Trust Company.

Now, this motion is quite different, Mr. Speaker. This motion is related to this bit of information from this document, and I would like to read it. It's only one short paragraph.

The province has agreed to indemnify North West Trust Company . . .

That would be the new North West Trust Company.

. . . from any loss in the event any of the payment or performance obligations of 354713 Alberta Ltd. [Softco], a company jointly owned by the Province and Treasury Branches . . .

interestingly enough

. . . are not paid or performed.

So we're now talking about indemnifying North West Trust if some of their investments in Softco should happen to turn sour. And that is quite different than the relationship between CDIC and North West Trust, which we were debating in Motion 159. So the Treasurer cannot pass this off as the same question. In fact, the statement here goes on to say some other interesting things related to this subject.

The company was established to finance the purchase of mortgages and real estate from North West Trust Company and Heritage Savings and Trust Company, the operations of which were acquired by North West Trust Company. The main obligations of the company that are covered by the indemnity consist of notes payable to North West Trust Company in the amount of \$80,854,000 at March 31, 1989 (1988 – \$69,332,000), and a commitment to purchase up to an additional \$36,254,000 (1988 – \$43,726,000) of certain assets of North West Trust Company, subject to the consent of the Province.

So, of course, the Treasurer is totally in control of both those companies and that relationship.

I can't help wondering why there would be such an agreement, and that's what we're asking: the information as to what the details are. You set up Softco basically to take the fall for all the rotten properties that were in the old North West Trust and the old Heritage Savings & Trust Company, and believe me, there were a lot of them. A lot of taxpayers' dollars had been pumped into those two institutions. Then, on top of that, just to make sure that the new North West Trust can make a go of it, you say: "Gee, if North West Trust . . . You know, you can invest \$80 million into Softco and charge them interest." I would think – at present interest rates, it would be at least \$8 million; I mean, 10 percent would not be uncommon. So the \$9 million profit that North West Trust was bragging about the other day would be made up of their investment in Softco alone. What did they do with the rest of their portfolio? Oh, no; I forgot. There's some money they took out of the reserve funds. Right? We went through that, [interjection] Yes, they're mentioned in there.

MR. JOHNSTON: Take another three years and you'll figure it out.

MR. McEACHERN: I've got it figured out. I corrected the Treasurer the other day when he tried to tell me my numbers were wrong, and read them right out of the North West Trust report.

MR. JOHNSTON: You were wrong.

MR. McEACHERN: Oh, no; I wasn't. You were wrong.

MR. SPEAKER: Through the Chair, please.

MR. McEACHERN: I had the exact facts which backed up what I said.

Mr. Speaker, what I don't understand is why you would set up Softco to take the fall and then turn around on top of that and add, sort of, to Softco's burden – well, the taxpayers' burden, because we're the ones picking it up if North West Trust should happen to suffer some losses in return. Having given North West Trust everything and given Softco all the dog properties, you'd think that would be bad enough. But if North West Trust should happen to lend Softco some money, which they have done, and Softco couldn't pay it back, then the Treasurer would make sure that it's paid back. In other words, the Alberta government is still totally guaranteeing North West Trust.

I guess it is related to the first topic, if you want to ask that. At what time are you going to cut the new North West Trust off the government tick? That, I guess, is the question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: There's a call for the question with respect to Motion for a Return 162.

[Motion lost]

163. Mr. Fox moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of audited financial statements of Gainers Inc. for the fiscal years 1984 to 1989 inclusive and a copy of the quarterly financial report for the period ended December 31, 1989.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, in the moments left for debate today on this issue, I would like to make an appeal to the Provincial Treasurer to try, in the course of responding to these motions for returns 163, 164, and several that follow after related to Gainers Properties and Gainers Inc. – motions for returns 264, 265, et cetera, et cetera, – to provide for members of the Assembly, indeed for all Albertans, a clear explanation of the fiscal sleight of hand that was going on between a government that in September of 1987 approved some deals with Peter Pocklington that they didn't make public till March of 1988, explain how it fit into the shell company that he alluded to earlier, explain the fiscal sleight of hand that went on with respect to the creation of Gainers Properties Inc. and how money was lent to Gainers Inc. and then preferred shares purchased by one company in the other.

He told us once in the Assembly that the government didn't hold any pref. shares in said company, but he could explain to us and to all Albertans who were holding the bag for their incompetence and mismanagement, just what happened to the money that the people of Alberta, through their government, lent to Peter Pocklington. What are the relationships between the various subsidiaries the said gentleman operated: Gainers Inc., Gainers Properties? Why did he remove the assets from one into the other, leaving one company holding nothing more than labels and copyrights?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Under Standing Order 8(3), at 4:30 Thursday afternoon we move to the next order of business.

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

MR. SPEAKER: First, in our gallery we have today 22 students and four adults. Most of the students are new Canadians. They

come from Windfields junior high school in Toronto, Ontario, and I'd ask that you recognize them and give them the welcome of the House.

head: **Public Bills and Orders
Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 207
Children's Rights Act**

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have introduced Bill 207, the Children's Rights Act.

I appreciate the opportunity today to explain why myself and my colleagues believe that this Bill is very timely and it's very crucial. This Bill contains many of the principles found in the convention on children's rights that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly just this past fall. Now, 60 countries have given the United Nations a statement of intent. In other words, Mr. Speaker, they have made a commitment to ratifying the convention on the rights of children. However, it's unfortunate, but Canada is not one of those 60 countries, so I think in this Assembly, if we accept this Bill, and I would hope that we would, this would give us a great opportunity to be leaders in this respect in this country. I understand that there is an interdepartmental committee looking into this issue in this province, and I'm surprised that we haven't heard more about that particular committee

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, gone are the days when children can be looked upon as pieces of property. We must recognize that children are individuals and they have certain rights in our society. Of course, we must also recognize, however, that children do not live in isolation. That is why section 3 is contained in the Bill, and it reads:

Nothing in this Act shall limit the responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents to provide appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in this Act.

That is why this section is in, Mr. Speaker, so in fact we're recognizing the important and fundamental role that parents play in the lives of their children by section 3.

Mr. Speaker, the rights of children is somewhat of an abstract concept. It is an idea. It is a principle. It is a declaration that we cherish our children. The recognition and acceptance of children's rights is also a recognition and acceptance, however, of adults' responsibilities. I believe one of the biggest myths in our society today is that we do cherish our children and that we do care for them. If we truly and sincerely cared for children in this province and in our society, then we would make sure that their needs are being met. But this is not the case. We have kids in this province without food. We have kids without proper clothing. We have kids who live on our streets and have no place to go and no one to care for them. We have kids who aren't in school. We have kids who are in school but cannot learn because they cannot see. We have kids without teeth. We have kids who are sick. We have kids who use drugs and alcohol to forget their pain, and we have kids who are called names at school because they are poor. We have kids who are beaten and abused by people whom they thought they could

trust, and we have those kids who are crying out for help but no one's listening to them. So, Mr. Speaker, if we truly cherished these children, we would not allow these situations to exist, or at least as a government we would start addressing these issues.

By accepting this Bill, Mr. Speaker, we are accepting the rightful obligation that we as legislators have towards our children in our society. By accepting this Bill, I believe we would be sending out a message, one that would be loud and clear, that children are a priority in this province and that all of our economic and social policies would reflect our genuine concern for these children. I think what a wonderful message we could be sending out, something I believe we could all be very proud of.

Mr. Speaker, there is a growing social movement in this country, and all over the world for that matter, working on behalf of children. Increasingly we are recognizing that children not only have a right to a secure and healthy future, but they have a right to food, clothing, housing, mental and physical health, education, and an environment free from abuse. Not only do children have a right to these basic fundamental necessities, but people are also recognizing that if we focus our attention on children, if we focus our resources on children, the payoff will be tremendous in the long run. The family plays a fundamental role in the healthy development of a child, and therefore we must mention that the support to families is absolutely paramount.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Council on Social Development in its 1989 fact book on poverty pointed out that poverty among young Canadian families has doubled since 1973. The report found that 30 percent of those living in poverty in Canada are children. According to information contained in a brief prepared in response to the workshop on poverty in schools that was held in Edmonton on May 12, 1989, one in six children in Alberta is living in poverty; 41,000 children in Edmonton live below the poverty line; 50 percent of children living in a female-headed single-parent family are living in poverty. So, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about thousands of Alberta children and their families. This government could prevent this by simply making a commitment to do something about it.

We have community agencies that have certainly responded to the issue of hungry children in our communities. We have seen snack programs being funded and administered by various community organizations in many of our schools throughout this province with virtually no support from this government whatsoever. I found, during the estimates on the Department of Family and Social Services, the endorsement of food banks by the minister absolutely alarming, and it illustrated to me, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the minister doesn't understand the devastating effects that poverty does have on the children of this province.

There are several initiatives that the government can undertake to enhance the lives of children who are poor in this province, the first being – and it's very obvious – the elimination of poverty and the guarantee that families and their children will have an adequate income in order that they can participate fully in our society and exercise choices in their lives and also live in dignity. There are many initiatives, Mr. Speaker, that the government could take. Another initiative is one that has been mentioned previously in this Assembly on various occasions, and that is support of preschool programs for young children who may not receive the necessary stimulation that is needed to ensure their healthy development and success once they enter into primary school.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation put out a document recently, Mr. Speaker, entitled *Children, Schools, and Poverty*. This document was issued in June of 1989. They point out in this document that low-income children are more likely to experience hunger, the effects of inadequate child care arrangements, behavioural problems, and low self-esteem. Many experience less motivation to learn, delayed cognitive development, lower achievement, lower career aspirations and expectations, interrupted school attendance, and higher dropout rates, and this is just to name a few. And they go on to say, Mr. Speaker:

Such school-related difficulties present serious long-term personal and social consequences: [like] illiteracy, delinquency, difficulties in personal adjustment, underemployment and unemployment.

So all of these are results of low-income children that do not succeed in school.

They go on in their document to make the case for supporting preschool programs, because there has been research done and the research proves that with these types of programs children in school do succeed. They find, Mr. Speaker, that fewer children are placed in special education classes, fewer repeat grades, more complete high school, fewer are dependent on social assistance, and more obtain employment. So, obviously, the results are clear that it's a very cost-effective program, something that would certainly enhance the opportunities for the children that we see growing up in poverty. The reason I have used this particular initiative as an example of an initiative that the government could act upon is that it is preventative in nature. I believe that we must address situations that cause injustices for children and focus our resources on early intervention.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill states that a child has the right to a high standard of mental and physical health and then goes on to talk about the "preventative and rehabilitative care for victims of child neglect and abuse." Again, I cannot emphasize how crucial it is for early intervention in situations where there is child neglect and abuse. I'm very distressed over the amount of time that it takes in this province for a child welfare worker to get out and investigate cases. We had an example used in question period today of some 80 cases not being able to be investigated. I would point out that while these child welfare investigators are not going out and investigating these cases, these children are certainly being placed at risk, and many are returned home . . .

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. I just caution the hon. member, under 23(b)(i) of Standing Orders, that the debate that she advances be relevant to the Bill and not bring in other items.

MS MJOLSNESS: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly when children are placed at risk, it does involve children's rights, and that's what we're talking about.

They have no way of knowing, when their calls come into a child welfare office, which ones are serious. They're asked to prioritize those cases, and they cannot do that. So my point is, Mr. Speaker, that the child welfare workers in this province cannot do the job that they're hired to do, and these children are being placed at risk. So this is another issue that I think we have to examine and we have to talk about when we're talking about children's rights, because we are placing children at risk in this province by not providing them with the services they need. I don't know how this government can justify these policies, because surely our children mean more to us than this.

I think this is a good example that illustrates how our children are not placed as a priority in our province.

Every one of us, I believe, Mr. Speaker, has a responsibility to advocate on behalf of children and to work towards social reform on their behalf. As concern for the environment escalates, we recognize that we are not alone, that we're all interconnected in some way. I think that we're not here as individuals; we are all interconnected. So when we talk about children's rights, we realize that we have to nurture children because when their lives are of quality, then ours are of quality as well. That, I believe, is a very important point to make: that if children are suffering, then as a society we suffer as well. So we must continue to advocate on behalf of children and recognize that they do have rights in our society. We must be able to recognize the weaknesses within the system that we have created and be willing to change that system.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear about the inadequacies of our child welfare system. High caseloads is just one aspect. Children are constantly being moved from foster home to foster home. Children are unable to develop a relationship with their social workers. Foster parents are unable to cope in many cases with the ever so troubled youths that they receive into their care. When we consider how many young people run away from substitute care and become homeless and live on our streets, we must be seriously concerned. Adolescents create a problem unto themselves in a sense, Mr. Speaker. Because resources for these young people are very restrictive and because these young people are apt to cause some difficulties, there is a reluctance to work on their behalf. So in many cases they are just disregarded, and by ignoring these youths, I believe we are placing them again at risk and we are failing them.

Bill 207 states that all children have "the right to food, clothing, [and] housing," the basic necessities of life, Mr. Speaker, not to mention access to health care and to education. The continuing presence of homeless children on our streets and runaways I believe is a stark example of how we are neglecting children in our society and in this province. Many of these adolescents do not have access to the basic necessities that they have a right to, and their futures look very bleak. We have a responsibility to protect these youths and to provide them with a healthy and safe future.

I mentioned that many of the youths living on our streets have run away from substitute care, and the majority of these kids have been abused in some way. When children run away from substitute care, I think we must begin, Mr. Speaker, to question why this is happening. Three people, I believe from the University of Calgary, Kufeldt, Armstrong, and Dorosh, explored some of the issues within child welfare and released a paper in 1989. They express some very interesting observations from their studies. They found that children and parents overwhelmingly agreed with the decision to remove the children from their families and put those children in care at that particular time. But they go on to say in their studies that if care is the best solution for these children and if the intent of the care is to rehabilitate and return these children to their homes, then one would expect that the focus of the social workers would be to help the parents with their problems so that the child could eventually return home. They found, however, that when a child is received into care, the focus switches from the family to the child. That is why so many children simply just get lost in care: because there's no effort made to reunite the child with their family.

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, we have begun to understand the importance of children in care being placed with their brothers and their sisters. It reduces the negative effects of separation and provides a natural support system, and it also reduces the incidence of foster home breakdown. Yet despite the positive effects, most of the siblings that we find in care are not placed together. We know that moves are common within the child welfare system, and what is shocking – they found this in their study – is that 70 percent of the kids that were asked said that they believed that it was a good idea that they be moved around; 70 percent of them agreed with the moves. So I think we really have to wonder and question what kind of situations they were being moved from.

Mr. Speaker, other findings were that the family, despite its continuing importance to the child, becomes a minor consideration when planning is done on behalf of that child in care. Many children do not bring their favourite possessions with them, and this again would help considerably in them overcoming the separation from their families.

Mr. Speaker, children in care have suffered some form of neglect and abuse and therefore have a very high risk of running from that particular home. Research indicates that in order to stabilize placement of the child, oftentimes the health and educational needs, as well as the family contacts, are jeopardized and become secondary. Now, Kathleen Kufeldt, the assistant dean of the Faculty of Social Welfare at the University of Calgary, wrote a paper called *Social Policy and Runaways*. She states:

Given the deficiencies within the system, the reluctance to care for the troubled adolescent, and the tendency to "control" rather than to [just] "care" [for them means] . . . that there need to be dramatic shifts in policies directed towards families, children and youth.

Mr. Speaker, I think if we accept this Bill, a Bill of Rights for children, we would have a responsibility to begin to look at the system that we have created and put in place and the problems that exist within that system. We must develop policies that respond to the needs of our youth and examine very closely how the current system is not meeting those needs.

Mr. Speaker, I will make a comment about native children, because I think this needs to be addressed as well, and it is quite evident that this present system is not meeting the needs of many, many native children. Recently I had contact with native child welfare workers, and they have expressed concern to me with, first of all, the lack of native child welfare workers working in the system; the lack of co-ordination between native foster parents so that they can give themselves support. There are all kinds of things lacking, deficiencies within the system that we have to examine. Recently we had an Ombudsman's report that dealt with native children and some of their problems that they are experiencing within the system. They put forth some very excellent recommendations, and we have yet to hear from the government in terms of when they are prepared to implement some of those recommendations. We're still waiting for action.

Suicide, Mr. Speaker, is the second leading cause of death among adolescents in Canada, trailing that of accidents. The rate of suicide is five times higher among natives than for others in our society. The average age for adolescents attempting suicide is 15 years old; 40 percent who try and fail will try again before they are 20 years old. When we look at young people who are suicidal, several risk factors are predominant, such as parental separation or death, psychiatric illness of the child,

long-term physical illness, and psychiatric or physical illness among other family members. So when we examine the risk factors, it becomes apparent how crucial it is that children have access to support systems such as counseling and treatment. And it is obvious that if a family member is suffering from mental illness, they also must have support because that also affects the child. When it is not available, the evidence is clear that the child's life is in danger; those risks are increased.

Mr. Speaker, my experience in the area of children's mental health in Alberta has been . . . I've been quite interested in this area, and I'm finding that as more and more people talk about this issue, we realize more and more that the services are just severely lacking in this province. I know of children who have attempted suicide who get discharged from the hospital and are returned home that very same day. There's no follow-up; there's no support given to those children or their families. Even if a young person has no home to go to, oftentimes they're still discharged from the hospital, with no place to go, with no follow-up as well. We just cannot treat our young people like this, in this way. We need immediate crisis intervention in these situations. We need crisis workers who are available on a 24-hour basis if we really care about these kids. Twenty-four to 72 hours of emergency residential care would also be something that would be very valuable for kids who are experiencing crises such as these. We need support services for their families.

Mr. Speaker, children feel the kinds of stresses that their families feel. Mothers and their children in this province are turned away from women's shelters because there are no beds for them. Our present policies do not meet the needs of families and their children. A good example of this is when I was in Grand Centre; there was a woman there staying at the shelter because she'd come away from an abusive situation, an abusive husband. She had an alcohol problem and wanted to go for treatment, which would take her away from her family for 28 days. She needed someone to care for her children so that she could go and deal with her alcohol problem. Of course, there was no child care available for her, and the suggestion was made that she just send her kids back home so her husband could care for them, even though she had left because he was abusive. So these are the kinds of issues that we have to start addressing. If we want to support children, we want to support their families.

I'll mention, Mr. Speaker, that child care in this province remains the worst in Canada. There still are no training requirements for day care workers. We're the only province that allows corporal punishment in our day cares, and I know of many families who cannot find quality child care.

What about those children who are living in group homes? This government sees nothing wrong with services being privatized and people getting involved in delivering services for a profit and running them as a business. I do not believe for a minute that the well-being of these children is paramount when a person is in this as a business to make a profit. There are virtually no standards. The monitoring system in the province is extremely weak when it comes to group homes for children.

Mr. Speaker, children are a silent minority in our society. Politically they have no clout: they cannot lobby and they cannot vote. Economically they have little power or no power at all. Children are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in our society. A Bill of Rights for children recognizes that children are important to us and that as a society we cherish them and will make every effort to ensure that they have a safe and healthy environment and a future. We must address the

systemic abuse and neglect of children of all ages, and I have pointed out a number of situations that exist in this province. Children are dependent beings, and it has never been clear whose responsibility it really is to ensure their well-being. Is it the province's, or is it an individual responsibility? A Bill of Rights for children, Mr. Speaker, implies equality, not in the sense that children are treated equally to adults, but that they are treated as human beings. If their rights are not respected, then it is the responsibility of the province to correct that.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

What this Bill is really asking for, Mr. Speaker, is that we as legislators make a commitment and take on the responsibility to the children of this province that we will do our utmost to guarantee them the quality of life and healthy future each and every one of them deserves.

Thank you.

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

MR. GESELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 207.

There are three areas, Mr. Speaker, that I would want to address in discussing this particular Bill. The first area is one of redundancy or, really, unnecessary duplication that's being suggested in this particular Bill. The second area deals with our government's support and commitment to the spirit of children's rights. The third area that I'd want to debate is some concrete examples that I want to draw on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Children's Rights Act, Bill 207, I believe is an unnecessary duplication of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I feel that this particular Bill, 207, is clearly based on that United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the General Assembly in November of 1989. The basic purpose is somewhat similar, and this Bill actually is maybe taken from the convention and the preamble and maybe also from some other sources that I'll get into later. But the consideration of the convention was really in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the charter of the United Nations. Those principles recognize the inherent dignity, equality, and inalienable rights of all members of the human family and the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. I think those are noble goals, and I think the new convention, because of those goals, has taken a holistic approach, arguing that the child's right to develop fully is not adequately assured unless it is educated and protected from arbitrary detention and exploitation. It is not a compromise document that they have prepared nor one that applies the law of the average, and I want to stress that. I think that's very important. It will bind the signatories to standards set by the countries with the best record of child care and protection.

Now, Canada played a very significant role in the development of that convention and is therefore eager to ratify the results of that convention. As the convention deals primarily with areas of provincial jurisdiction, the federal government requires the consent of all provinces before ratification. The Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs has advised the Hon. Joe Clark of Alberta's support for Canada's ratification of the convention. The minister has noted, however, that some legislative adjustment may be required by Alberta. Now, as a result of that, there has been in Alberta a working group – the member introducing the Bill has referenced the interdepartmen-

tal committee – and that working group on the rights of the child was created to analyze the Alberta situation regarding conformity with the United Nations convention.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the working group – and I'm amazed the hon. member is not aware – consisted of representation from and representatives of the following Alberta government departments: Family and Social Services was involved, the Attorney General, Education, the Women's Secretariat, Culture and Multiculturalism, Career Development and Employment, Health, the Solicitor General, and Labour. Now, that working group found that Alberta is, in fact, in compliance with most of the convention's provisions and in some cases, in many cases actually, exceeds and expands upon them.

There was some concern noted with respect to two areas of the Child Welfare Act. However, I believe that under the broad interpretation of the convention, the Act can meet all of those criteria that have been set by the convention. Now, if absolute compliance is impossible, I think minor amendments to the Child Welfare Act and the Domestic Relations Act would fulfill Alberta's responsibilities under that United Nations convention. I would hope that rather than proposing the abstract concept, as the member has called the Bill, the hon. member might seriously address and undertake work in this particular area, which would be more beneficial.

I know both the governments of Alberta and Canada have endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Now, the hon. member introducing the Bill states that Canada is not one of the 60 countries who have endorsed the convention. That is not correct according to information that I have. In fact, both the governments of Alberta and Canada have endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Alberta has investigated its legislation through the interdepartmental committee and found it to be in line with that convention. Therefore, in my mind there's no further need for the development of a children's Bill of Rights. This is my initial point, that the proposal that's put before us is redundant; we have already dealt with the convention and the objectives outlined under it. Bill 207 is redundant because of that. It is a duplication of the United Nations document, to which we already subscribe in Alberta. We already have in place, Mr. Speaker, legislation like the Child Welfare Act that actually deals with those objectives outlined under the convention and the objectives that are restated in this proposed Bill.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the second area that I wanted to talk about is the Alberta support for the spirit of children's rights. I think that although it's inappropriate to support Bill 207 as a statutory instrument at this time because of the duplication and redundancy, I do definitely support the broad spirit of the Bill, the abstract concept that has been proposed by the hon. member. But by supporting the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and by agreeing to be bound by the provisions of that convention, which we have done, this government has acknowledged the intent. We already have our objectives in place with respect to those intentions and objectives, and Bill 207 is not really applicable.

In our support of the United Nations convention, however, Mr. Speaker, this government is doing more than standing up for the rights of Alberta children. I want to stress that. We are also standing up for the rights of all children: the starving children in Ethiopia and India, for the rights of children fighting wars in the Middle East, and for children walking the streets, as prostitutes perhaps, in Bangkok and Singapore. Amnesty International reports that children are being arbitrarily detained

and tortured in 32 countries. Seven million children live in the streets in Brazil, many of whom will eventually end up as victims of organized death squads and crime. We, I think, have to ensure that our own house is in order before we start to condemn others. However, by agreeing to be bound by the provisions of the United Nations convention, we have committed ourselves not just to the protection of children's rights in Alberta; we've also declared our commitment to the protection of those rights everywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, we don't need a Children's Rights Act. I think we're already far beyond that in our legislation in Alberta. I think the Act as it is proposed is basically a hangover of previous introductions of similar legislation in this House, and I think the first legislation of this nature, basically in exactly the same form, was introduced by Grant Notley in 1979. So it's a rote repetition of rhetoric that we have here, without realizing the steps that Alberta has already taken with respect to children's rights. I think it would be more appropriate if the opposition would concentrate on providing some concrete suggestions, rather than the token gestures and the abstract concepts, to deal with the problems that are faced by Alberta children.

One of the comments that was made by the member was that we are placing children at risk. Reference was made to social workers, Mr. Speaker, and I think I'm just responding to the member's claims. Well, we have here an illegal strike, and I feel that the hon. members of the opposition, by not encouraging workers to go back and care for those children and enter into meaningful discussions, are in fact placing our children at risk.

At the beginning of the spring session, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition supplied an alternate throne speech setting out their agenda for the solution to this particular problem. They talked about – and let me quote from their speech:

During the next session, New Democrats will introduce a Children's Bill of Rights to ensure that every child has the right to a home, food and clothing [and so on]. Our Children's Bill of Rights will commit the government of Alberta to ending hunger, sickness and neglect for our children.

They're abstract concepts, Mr. Speaker. They're valuable concepts, but I would prefer if the hon. members would come up with some concrete examples to actually attack those problems and find some solutions instead of the empty rhetoric we're getting now.

This Bill is really a Bill that is somewhat Johnny-come-lately, because the actions that are being suggested in this Bill are already in place. Prominent in their particular throne speech was the issue of children living in poverty. I hope that Bill 207 is not their solution to it, because it doesn't propose any particular solutions, and it concerns me. The Children's Rights Act is a nice, safe gesture, and it's a gesture that the hon. members in the opposition are making which calls to attention the fact that there are children going to school that are hungry and are living in poverty. But it is an empty gesture nevertheless, Mr. Speaker.

While the opposition argues loudly about children's right to eat, the government actually promotes some concrete programs that deal with that particular problem, and I wish the hon. members in the opposition would have that same attitude: to provide some suggestions or programs that would deal with that. Let me just call on the school snack program that we have in place. That is a concrete example of how we are actually dealing with that problem. I haven't heard any concrete suggestion or any additional suggestions that we might pursue, in order to overcome this problem, from the members of the opposition. We also promote healthy living standards, as a

concrete example, Mr. Speaker. While the opposition declares the child's right to home life, we in government take concrete steps to protect and promote the family. I think perhaps it's time for the opposition to lay aside the rhetoric that they're following and maybe follow our lead with policies for real solutions to the problems faced by Alberta children.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal a little bit more with the concrete examples, because I want to draw an analogy here. This empty rhetoric, this abstract concept, was also proposed by the governments in eastern Europe, but there were no concrete examples of actually protecting the children's rights. There is empirical evidence here of what has actually occurred in those countries. Now, it's fine to come up with abstract ideas, and they're worthwhile, but I think there need to be some solid suggestions, some concrete examples given by the opposition of how we actually deal with those problems that we have and that children in other countries have.

I feel that the research that has – well, actually, there has been limited research, Mr. Speaker, on this particular Bill. As I say, it's just been carried forward. But there should have been, perhaps, some research undertaken with respect to the existing legislation that we have in place to determine where this proposed legislation duplicates some of the initiatives that are already incorporated in existing legislation, but also where the proposals may be, in fact, in contravention of existing legislation. That may have been a more worthwhile effort than the abstract ideas and the abstract concepts that are proposed in this particular Bill.

I think the analogy to the situation in eastern Europe needs to be clearly kept in mind, because there we have a severe problem with children and children's rights. I note that there needs to be something done with it. I think under the convention and under our support for that convention and Canada's support for that convention, we can achieve some measure to deal with that particular problem. I do not think the abstract concept that's proposed here will actually do away with the problem or provide some specific solutions to the problem. I would ask the hon. members to translate those ideas they have into some reality, some concrete programs that will actually achieve some of these objectives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few brief comments on this Bill, which I intend to support, and I expect every government member to support this Bill. This Bill gives voice to a commitment from this government that a number of people suggest is already there. Well, if it's there, what would be your resistance? The Bill is a commitment to children to prevent their suffering and helplessness. They're our most vulnerable group. To do other than support a children's Bill of Rights is to do a disservice to that group in society.

Mr. Speaker, previous speakers have spoken about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yes, this convention was adopted in November '89. The original UN declaration of human rights was adopted in 1948, and the rights and liberties of children were explicitly included in that particular document. Then in 1959 we had the Declaration of the Rights of the Child at the UN and, following that, in 1989 the convention which other members have spoken of.

Mr. Speaker, the convention is now open for signatures. To date 60 countries have signed it; none at this point has ratified it. That's the difficult part of the process. All laws of the individual country have to conform to the articles before it can be ratified, and the laws in some cases must be changed. It won't become international law, which is the objective, of course, until 20 countries have passed ratification. It's my understanding that in Canada 13 jurisdictions – that's federal government, 10 provinces, and two territories – must ensure that their respective laws conform with this convention. To date Alberta and most of the provinces have given support to ratifying it. There's a wide range of status, of course, in each province. Some have not yet even begun to look at their legislation; others have indicated they're in compliance with the convention and ready to ratify at this point.

Mr. Speaker, as has been attested, Alberta has signed the agreement of intent, but there are a number of questions still outstanding with respect to the status of Alberta's involvement. We don't know when we can anticipate ratification by this province. We know a committee has been working on it and has studied the existing legislation to review whether changes are necessary. We would like to know, and I think we should know, what the pieces of legislation are that are not presently in conformity with the convention. We need to know what, if anything, the Alberta government is doing to encourage and to work with other provinces to begin their ratification processes, and we need to know how we compare to other provinces. As yet we've had no comprehensive report on the status of Alberta's ratification, although it's my belief and understanding that there is an intent here to move in that direction. The organizations and institutions of our communities are eager to know this. Every place I go in the province, people express profound support for this convention and want to know the position their provincial government is taking and when it will be ratified and when the national government will ratify it as well.

Mr./Speaker, the irony, of course, is that we are today talking about a Children's Rights Act and at the same time we're having many discussions and questions and answers in this House about child welfare relative to the job action that's happening now by Alberta social workers and psychologists and child care counselors. If we really cared, I suspect this wouldn't be happening, and one wonders if in fact it could happen if we had a Children's Rights Act. I think that begs some other questions of the government as well.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that in the case of children who are in wardship, temporary or permanent guardianship of the province, the minister is the surrogate parent and as such bears real responsibilities for the well-being of the children in his care. We are alarmed at the current state of the circumstances in the job action, with the situation where the child abuse line is not operational at this point in time, where children in care are being cared for by persons who perhaps do not have the skills and who are not comfortable working in those environments. We also know, of course, that over time the government has commissioned a number of studies and reports that address the issue that's at stake here; that is, the high caseloads that workers attest are not allowing them to deal as they should with child welfare cases, including investigation reports on native foster care. We've had a number of reports: the Catonio, Cavanagh, Thomlison, Porter, to name a few, and the Ombudsman's report. All of these reports comment on unbearable working conditions and caseloads. As yet their recommendations have to be

addressed in full. In addition, in August '89 the department itself commissioned a report which provided the government with a model for child care standards to deal with child welfare. These to date have not been adopted.

So we see some major clues, Mr. Speaker, as to why we should be looking actively at a Bill of Rights for children. The actual items in the Bill deal with a number of issues where I find the government to be deficient, and we all need to be reminded of our responsibilities from time to time. When we look at section 4, related to poverty, the issues of food, clothing, and shelter – and we know there are many children in our province living in poverty, one in six estimated to be living in poverty at this present time, 41,000, nearly one in four, in the city of Edmonton alone living below the poverty line. Fifty percent of all children in female-headed single-parent families live in poverty. Poverty and poor school performance are linked; there's no question about that. These children are less likely to finish high school and score far below the provincial average on standardized tests.

Mr. Speaker, the social assistance rates have not been touched, except to be lowered, since '82. The circumstances are critical enough now, and the minister has spoken about major reforms. As yet we have not seen them. We have no notion of what's going to happen when the GST comes in and the effect that will have on working poor and people who are requiring support in our province.

I was pleased, Mr. Speaker, when the Child Welfare Act came in that there is a Children's Advocate, and we all look forward to hearing the report of this advocate and determining the kinds of things the advocate is having to deal with. There are also items in the Child Welfare Act that I support related to children being involved in decisions, and I think section 4(iv) supports and reinforces that as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Calder has spoken about the need to have such a Bill to protect children from hunger. We see increasing examples not just of the incidence of food banks – 30, 31 of them in our province at present – but in the need for school lunches and snack programs. These, in spite of other comments made earlier, are run by volunteers and churches. They aren't government programs. They are run by communities who see the desperation of children, particularly children in certain areas in urban centres, and the need for these children to have adequate nutrition in order that they can continue with their schooling. We also have a grave need of Head Start programs, and the Bill speaks to the need and the responsibility to have access to education for children and to provide them with an environment where they not only have access to education but can avail themselves of it. There are a number of local examples of these kinds of programs, most of them voluntarily operated or operated by community groups and churches in our communities.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

The Bill also speaks to the mental health of children. Our minister has indicated to us on a number of occasions that the government is gravely concerned about the mental health of children and mental health services for children. They are still abysmally lacking, particularly in isolated centres, and we have yet to see any concrete – your word – proposal regarding what is intended to provide this kind of service to children and their families throughout the province. The section c(i) under item 4 is "preventative and rehabilitative care for victims of child neglect and abuse." Well, once again, the present job action has shut down the child abuse hot line. We don't have adequate respite care for families who are trying desperately to keep together by keeping a handicapped child at home. We have the circumstances of native children in foster care, of homeless children, of the government providing a white paper on child care and intending to apply some of their ideas that are in that paper for different standards and different levels of care, yet the communities have had no opportunity, really, for input at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Bill is a companion piece, to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I think it is overdue in our province. I see no reason whatsoever that any member would hesitate in any way, shape, or form to commit themselves to a Bill of Rights for children in Alberta. To do anything less, as I say, is a disservice to the children of Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bow Valley, wishing to adjourn debate.

MR. MUSGROVE: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move we adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

Those in favour of the motion to adjourn debate, please signify by saying aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried. Thank you. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that when the members assemble this evening at 8 p.m., they do so in Committee of Supply.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Motion carries.

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