

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Thursday, May 16, 1991**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 91/05/16

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head:

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people.

We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans.

Amen.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table copies of a directive from an insurance company to insurance agents in this province outlining highly restrictive and in fact almost discriminatory policy program practices; that is, practices for determining who they will insure and who they will not insure.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Recreation and Parks.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to finally file four copies of a report on Team Alberta and their participation at the Canada Games in 1991 at Prince Edward Island.

head:

Introduction of Special Guests

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure, sir, to introduce to you today and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 13 members from the Sherwood Park nursing home in our constituency of Sherwood Park. They're joined by Mrs. Daphne Sutton. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand so that we could extend them a very warm welcome to this Legislative Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Clover Bar.

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and the members of the Assembly 31 guests from St. Luke school in the constituency of Clover Bar. As a matter of fact, they're neighbours of mine; they are right close to my home. It's a pleasure to welcome them here today. The students are accompanied by Miss Goerres and Ms Brinkman. I would ask that the teachers and students rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. WEISS: The Quebec/Alberta student employment exchange program was introduced to postsecondary students in 1979, at which time five students participated from each province. Today the program has expanded to include a total of 90 students with 45 from each province. Of the 45 students selected from each province, one is the group leader who acts as liaison between the students and program staff. Mr. Speaker, today we're fortunate to have in the members' gallery this year's group leader, Mr. Guy St. Pierre, accompanied by the program administrator from my department, Frances Arnieri-Ballas. I welcome Guy and his group to Alberta and ask him and Frances to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I'm privileged to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 15 young women from the Greely Road school located in the

constituency of Fort McMurray. They are accompanied by teacher Ms Carolyn Dozeman and secretary Mrs. Bev Price. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I've had the privilege of knowing this young lady for many years. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the cordial welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 11 grade 10 students from Dr. Folkins community school in Chauvin, in our Wainwright constituency. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a rare pleasure for me to introduce a second group to you and to members of the Assembly this week. Today from the constituency of Calgary-North West we've got a group of 25 eager and keen grade 6 students from the St. Vincent de Paul school located in Varsity community. With them are teachers Mr. Patrick McMillan, Mr. Abraham, Mrs. Ku, and Mrs. Smith. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period**Social Assistance Policy**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Family and Social Services. We recall that yesterday we had a discussion about the people increasingly using and needing the food bank, especially in Calgary, and a shocking 14 percent increase in Edmonton for April alone. The reaction from the Premier was that I shouldn't have mentioned it because I may cause the whole economy to collapse. More importantly, the reaction from this government to the growing ranks of those whose meagre social allowance benefits are insufficient to feed them, we're not sure. I'd like to file with this Assembly a copy of a letter written yesterday by the Edmonton Social Planning Council to the provincial director of income support services. After meeting with the director this letter indicates that the province is going to strictly interpret its policy so that the department will cut down on the number of emergency food vouchers given to those in need. My question to the minister is this: at the risk of destroying Alberta's fragile confidence in the best economy in the universe, why is this government bringing in this blame-the-victims policy when there is an increase in people needing this service?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not a blame-the-victims policy. This government has gone to great lengths in recent months to enhance our social programs. We've increased our shelter rates. We've increased our food rates and put an emphasis on food for children in particular. We do have an emergency voucher system in place, and we expect it to be applied fairly and equitably across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd point out that there's also an appeal process, that any individual on social allowance who isn't satisfied with the level of support they're receiving has the right to go to a citizen's appeal panel to have their situation heard fully and satisfactorily, and they'll make the final decision.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a change in government policy, and it is a blame-the-victim policy. This government gets worried about what they perceive is abuse from the poor while they hand out millions of dollars to their corporate friends, and they don't worry about that when it goes down.

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the emergency food allowance is a staggering \$14 a month per child and an astronomical \$22 per month for an adult, doesn't the minister know that the department could well end up spending more money on screening recipients than it would on issuing vouchers to those who need them?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's a reasonable conclusion to make. Again, we take the time to meet with clients that need our help. I've outlined some of the increases that we've just announced. I've announced some of the services that we're providing. Further to that, we also work with them to help them gain their independence, help them become meaningfully employed. I think the leader would agree with me that for the most part what these people want is the opportunity to gain the necessary skills or to take the skills that they have and apply them in the workplace. We're going to continue to help them to be able to do that.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a change of policy. The Social Planning Council's well aware of it. They've written a letter complaining about it, and it is going to put hardship on these people, and as indicated in the letter, there's no legitimacy to their claims. It's not thought out, and it's a change in the policy. Two years ago the regional director at that time saw fit to provide food vouchers to clients forced to go to the food bank, and now the new regional director is reversing this policy. This is going to add more pressure on the food banks.

My question to the minister is this: given that it is his department's clear responsibility for providing for people's basic needs, how can the minister justify off-loading clients on the food bank instead of providing them with emergency food vouchers?

2:40

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, let me say a few things, because I think it's important to set the record straight. One is that we will continue to make emergency vouchers available to those that genuinely need them. Two, I don't think this member should sit there so sanctimoniously talking about food banks, because if we'd listened to this member, we wouldn't have a Gainers plant still operating, and we'd have 1,200 more people from there in the lineups at the food bank. If we'd listened to this member, we wouldn't have an Al-Pac and the thousands of jobs that that's creating. We'd have those people in the lineups. What we'd have is a situation like they have in Ontario, where hundreds of thousands of jobs are being lost and they're turning to food banks in droves. That's what his comrades are doing down in Ontario.

MR. MARTIN: Yeah, I'd like to have that \$1.3 billion in corporate welfare that we wasted to put into the food banks. You're darn right we would. Yes, and the Treasurer, he'd like it back too.

Kananaskis Development Proposal

MR. MARTIN: My question is to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Let's move from the government's treatment of the needy to its

rather different approach to its friends. We all know that cutting secret deals from behind closed doors with its friends is nothing new for this government. We only need to recall the awarding of the Kananaskis golf course along with the millions of taxpayers' dollars to the Premier's old football chums as an example of this unjustifiable practice. Now, in another case that smacks of secrecy and favouritism, we see yet another example of a decision to award a Crown lease in Kananaskis Country to a developer with a cosy relationship with the Premier and other members of the government. They're going to have a resort and health spa; really crucial. My question to the Premier is this: will the Premier explain why his government has awarded rights to Crown land from behind closed doors to a friend of his government Mr. Rudi Schmidt without ever notifying the public so that Albertans could express their opinions on this development or tender the project themselves?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition shouldn't believe everything he reads in the newspaper. I've never met Mr. Schmidt and to take that kind of research is just nonsense.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that the development proposal for Kananaskis Country is consistent with the Kananaskis policy. The Minister of Recreation and Parks may wish to supplement my answer.

MR. MARTIN: You may not have met the man. The Premier sends love letters to him, though, Mr. Speaker, so obviously he knows him, and that's who the question was going to.

I want to come back to the Premier because it has to do with a code of ethics and responsibility in this government. Again, I want to ask: will the Premier tell us, because he leads the government, why the negotiations and the decision to award the Crown lease for this project were conducted in secret? What is the government trying to hide?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about. We're not secretive about anything. There's been a proposal there for some time. It'll have to go through the process that's clearly defined, and part of that would be, of course, public consultation. Unless he can be more definitive . . . The Minister of Recreation and Parks may wish to supplement with respect to the public involvement and the public consultation that will take place.

MR. MARTIN: Well, I don't know why you're trying to answer the questions anyhow; you don't know what's going on. I asked them of the Premier, Mr. Speaker. I asked him about Rudi Schmidt.

We'll turn over to our friend the protector of the environment for the third question: the Minister of the Environment. Mr. Speaker, the spokesman for Kananaskis has informed us that this project will require the construction of one kilometre of road, installation of all utilities, and other environmental intrusions. I would point out that the developer plans ultimately to double the facility's size and add 20 chalets throughout this property. My question to the minister: given that this project is a little bigger than a doghouse and also that it is to be located in one of Alberta's prime environmental and recreational areas, will the minister tell us why he won't do the job here and require a proper environmental impact assessment?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member assumes quite a bit. His one assumption, though, is quite correct. I do think that I'm the protector of the environment; that's a correct assumption.

I understand what we have before us is a proposal that indeed is in its embryo stage. Someone has brought to my colleague the Minister of Tourism, or perhaps to the Minister of Recreation and Parks or to the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, an idea, a concept, and it's under review. When that proposal becomes a reality, if it becomes a reality, then we will do an environmental screening. We will make a determination at that time if it will be subjected to a full-blown environmental impact assessment. Under the rules of the NRCB, if in fact it is subjected to an environmental impact assessment, it will have to go before the Natural Resources Conservation Board for a full and complete environmental review. Through that process we will indeed be protecting the environment.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Very briefly.

DR. WEST: Yes. This proposal is not unlike many proposals that come before Recreation and Parks in many of our areas throughout the province, and this does go through a certain review. The Kananaskis Country Citizens' Advisory Committee reviewed this proposal on April 18, 1989, had no objections, and found that it was consistent with the original integrated resource management plan for Kananaskis Country. We have had other proposals come forward, and they were given options to lease subject to stringent perusal of their proposals including the environmental tests. Some of those proposals fall off at the deadline and disappear. This one here has been given some extension but, to date, has not met the tests that were put before it. We'll wait to see what the proponents do, but this is consistent with policies throughout our recreational lands in the province of Alberta and . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. [interjection] Thank you, hon. minister.

Provincial Debt

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the hon. Treasurer. Moody's, an international rating agency, assessed the books of the province of Alberta as at May 2 of this year. They concluded after that assessment that the actual debt of the province is some \$14.73 billion, and that's almost a quarter of a billion dollar increase since they assessed six months ago. Unbelievably, the Treasurer runs around Alberta telling Albertans that the debt is only \$10 billion. My first question is this: based on the belief that it's harmful to hurt a fragile economy – I like that line – why does the Treasurer continue to try to cook the books and fool Albertans into believing that the debt is only \$10 billion when it's \$14.73 billion?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, there's a clear reporting of the debt of the province of Alberta. What we have reported in the public accounts and in the budget is in fact the standard approach to measuring debt.

What I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that there are variations on that calculation. Some debt, for example, is funded on a utility basis, that it's guaranteed to be repaid. The case of the city of Edmonton would be one of the examples. Other debt, for

example, is pledged against specific assets. Certainly, what we borrow to ensure the 9 percent farm credit stability program, which is being repaid by farmers, is part of that debt. Still further, some rating agencies actually include the deposits in the Treasury Branch as part of the Alberta government debt.

So you can see that some of the classifications go from reasonable – and that's the position we presented to the people of Alberta in our budget, which confirms our debt at just under the \$11 billion level – to other kinds of debt calculations, which would sweep in all kinds of liabilities. Now, the member can make the worst case, but the real fact of the matter with respect to debt is that the province of Alberta has the best debt record of any province in Canada. Moreover, today that was confirmed.

The member mentions Moody's. Guess what happened today in the province of Ontario. The province of Ontario was downgraded not one grade, but two grades. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, this is important information: from a triple rating down to AA-2. Alberta is now the best rated province in Canada. Now, who has responsibility?

2:50

MR. DECORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that the NDP aren't serious about fiscal responsibilities. [interjections] Now, calm down; calm down here.

Mr. Speaker, the debt has gone from \$10 billion just a short time ago to now \$11 billion. This is a rating agency that uses standard techniques to look at all of the governments of North America and the world, and it shows a huge debt. When you couple that with the \$9 billion unfunded pension liability, it's over \$23 billion. The question is: when are we going to see a plan? When are we going to see a plan to pay down both components: the \$14.3 billion and the \$9 billion? Where are the plans to pay these down?

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't believe that the member would ask that kind of a question. First of all, what government outside of Alberta has presented a plan to their population more specifically defined, more clearly outlined and committed to and followed than the province of Alberta? Now, I know that that one of the Blues Brothers doesn't like to hear about the good news in Alberta and the fact that we have a balanced budget, the only province in Canada with a balanced budget. That plan is clear. Let me say that the plan is this: we said that we would reduce the deficit, we would not unload the taxes on the shoulders of the residents of the province, as the Liberal Party and the ND Party have done in Ontario, but we would look after it ourselves and then we'd start to reduce the debt. Alberta is the only province with more assets than liabilities.

Now, just a minute ago the leader of the Liberal Party, from Edmonton-Glengarry, said that the unfunded liability is \$9 billion. Well, that's the kind of absolute garbage you hear from that member. That just is absolutely wrong, absolutely wrong. It's going to take us a longer time to convince him, but I'm not going to try and do it.

Let me come back to the rating agencies again, Mr. Speaker, and here's the key thing: the world markets. The world markets have looked at the provinces across Canada. Ontario has been downgraded by two major ratings. Half of that must be the Liberal Party in Ontario, one of the profligate spending groups in Canada, the Liberal parties across this province and across Canada, and half of it has to go to the socialists now in place. Alberta has been reviewed by Moody's and has been confirmed. It has been confirmed: we have the best credit rating of any

province in Canada and the best borrowing opportunities in any capital market around the world. That's the way it is.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, just last week the Liberal caucus attempted to press the government to come forward with a plan or a formula to pay down the unfunded pension liability. Incredibly the spokesperson for the government said that the opposition had to prepare the formula or the plan. There is no plan. When, Mr. Treasurer, are we going to get the plan to pay down that unfunded pension liability? When, when, when?

AN HON. MEMBER: You can see when a guy's having a bad day.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, it is truly a bad day for the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. I'm reminded of my mother's words to me. A long time ago she said, "He who has little to say often repeats it," and that's exactly what we see here today.

Mr. Speaker, we have said in this Assembly before, not just members of the government but specifically the Minister of Education, the Premier, and myself, that we are in fact in the process of completing a work-out with respect to the pension liability. The pension liability is in fact a problem for all Albertans. We are taking a very careful look at it. The Minister of Education's already had some preliminary discussions with the Alberta Teachers' Association, because in fact that's the more critical element. We are in the process of reviewing ways in which we can deal with the broad other set of plans that are before us. That will be brought forward in the same careful, managed way as other policies are on behalf of this government, in the same way that we managed ourselves out of the deficit and brought the government of Alberta and the people of Alberta to a balanced budget and will go on to reduce the debt. We'll deal in the same effective manner with the pension liability, Mr. Speaker, and the people of Alberta know that full well.

Westaim Research Facility

MR. GESELL: To the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications: with the recent opening of the Mackiw Centre in Fort Saskatchewan, how is Alberta positioned in Canada and in the world with respect to the research and development of advanced industrial materials and the commercialization of such materials?

MR. STEWART: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that the opposition will be able to take some more good news, but indeed this is exactly what the hon. member is raising. I was very proud, along with the hon. member, in Fort Saskatchewan, in his constituency, to attend the opening of the new Westaim research and development complex, which is part of a network of research facilities within this province that is putting Alberta at the very top in the area of the research and development infrastructure. It's a model because it combines the private sector and two levels of government, along with the research councils and the universities, in a real co-operative partnership. It goes on a project-by-project basis where peer groups will assess the technology, the research projects that are going forward, and it really is a model.

The advanced industrial materials, in polymers, in composites, in alloys, is an area that is very much a strength of Alberta,

and that's the sort of opportunity that will exist through this new research facility.

MR. GESELL: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what impact will the Westaim project have on the local municipality? I'm not just talking about the positive additional employment opportunities; I'm talking about the responsibilities and obligations for services that rest with the municipality.

MR. STEWART: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's certainly good news for the municipality, not just from the standpoint of the jobs that will be created at the time that it gets going but into the future. Not only will it provide immediate jobs; it will provide new career opportunities for the children to stay in that area and indeed for the graduates of our postsecondary institutions.

The president of the Westaim initiatives, Dr. Bob Weir, estimates that 300 scientists, engineers, and technologists will be employed in 1991 and that that figure will grow to 500 in the next five years. He further estimates that the indirect impact on employment within that area by the year 2000, combined employment through commercialization, will result in more than 3,000 new jobs. So that's a significant area in which there'll be growth in the hon. member's constituency and throughout Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

Magnesium Plant

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Alberta taxpayers inherited a defunct magnesium plant near High River, this government claimed that the maximum exposure would be its \$103 million guaranteed loan. Well, there are other creditors left in the lurch, including the town of High River, which is owed \$580,000 for the servicing they provided to the plant. MagCan's owners, whoever they may be, have been leaning on the town to write off most of that debt. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: given that the Alberta government is taking control of this defunct plant, will the minister assure the Assembly today that the province will pay in full its debt to the town of High River?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, that's the typical socialist philosophy, whereby they want the government to do everything. We recognize that there is a difference of opinion as it relates to the town and the company, and there are methods in place to resolve that issue. I understand that they are going through that process of hopefully resolving what we consider a very important issue.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, both the province and town are claiming the same assets to cover their debt, so it looks like this government is choosing a collision course with the town on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Smoky River got his picture in a weekly newspaper giving a \$100,000 cheque to the MD of Smoky River to compensate for lost municipal taxation revenue on a defunct fertilizer plant near High Prairie. Would the minister explain the double standard of providing a \$100,000 gift to one municipality for lost industrial assessment while on the other hand refusing to pay the town of High River for outstanding utility bills?

3:00

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again is incorrect. It's typical of the New Democratic Party, whereby they persist in misinformation on a consistent basis. There really is no double standard whatsoever. I just indicated to the hon. member that there is a process in place whereby hopefully this issue will be resolved. There's always plenty of time to look at other measures that might have to be put in place if that is required, but to suggest that should take place at this present time is totally ridiculous.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

Sexual Abuse of Children

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School guidance counselors report that in Alberta children who suffer the silent agony of sexual abuse are victims of a system that leaves them stranded without long-term counseling after they report the abuse to their teachers. The system rightly requires that their claim of abuse be reported to child welfare authorities, but as a result the children lose their privacy at school and often incur the wrath of their parents and siblings because of the intrusion of the system into their family and because the family is in denial. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: considering that the system provides nothing more than immediate short-term counseling from a school guidance counselor and that the child is under enormous psychological pressure because the family may either not want to or may not be able to provide long-term counseling, would the minister make long-term counseling mandatory, and would his department consider paying for such counseling if the family cannot?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of means for children and families to access counseling here in the province of Alberta. I'd first of all remind the member that we as a department have worked very closely with the Minister of Advanced Education, the Minister of Health, school board trustees, and school boards across this province. We've put into place reasonable protocols. For the most part they seem to be working very, very well in meeting the needs of children.

MRS. GAGNON: We're talking about shattered young lives here. This is a very serious gap in resources. To the minister: how can you pontificate that needs are being met when you know that if a family cannot pay, the only way they can get the service is by giving their child up to become a ward of the state?

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, that just plain and simply isn't so. Certainly through my department if they are under a temporary guardianship order or a permanent guardianship order, then they become my responsibility, and I make sure they get the kind of counseling and support they need. There are also, again I repeat, a number of agencies throughout the city of Calgary and throughout this province that provide those kinds of services. Some of them are made available on a fee-for-service basis, some of them are graduated fees to be able to fit individual circumstances, and some have no fees at all.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Wainwright.

Canola Processing

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. The good news of the proposed

sale of the Lloydminster canola crushing plant is most welcome to the producers in eastern Alberta. The previous owners, United Grain Growers, closed down the plant six months ago. One of the reasons for the shutdown was that they were not prepared to compete against the government-owned, government-operated, and government-financed Sexsmith crushing plant with its \$5 million annual operating loss. Now, given that the government competition problem is still here, will the minister tell the House what his plans for the Sexsmith plant are?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, senior members of ADM, the firm that has almost closed the deal on the Lloydminster plant, met with myself and members of the department a few weeks ago. They were fully aware at the time of the Sexsmith operation and that Sexsmith would continue to operate. They've taken that into consideration in their decision-making. They were fully briefed on the impact of the Western Grain Transportation Act and the negative impact that has on the operation. You may recall that although UGG did blame our involvement in Sexsmith as one of their reasons for closing that plant, they blamed the Western Grain Transportation Act as a much more significant reason. So I welcome the sale and the fact that it would appear that the plant will remain in Lloydminster to serve people in the eastern part of the province.

MR. FISCHER: When, then, is the minister going to put the Sexsmith plant up for sale?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, the minister will be prepared to recommend putting the Sexsmith plant up for sale at that point in time when it becomes a profitable operation and a serious operator from the private sector is prepared to take it and continue operating it to serve the producers of the north. Might I suggest to the House and maybe to members on both sides that if we're successful in changing the method of payment, which currently works against value adding on the prairies, with the removal of the tariffs on the flow of meal and oil into the U.S.A., you will probably have a viable canola processing industry in western Canada that many people will be interested in getting into.

MR. SPEAKER: Stony Plain.

Student Achievement Tests

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think Alberta's education system is as bad as the minister indicated yesterday. Our schools and our teachers are excellent, but the minister uses the wrong method to measure achievement in grades kindergarten through 3. ECS teachers are trained to teach children to think, but children don't get tested for the kind of knowledge that equips them for the future and reflects their school experience. To the Minister of Education: given that the professionals in the field have rightly concluded that the current grade 3 achievement test is narrow, unreliable, misleading, and does not provide accountability to students, teachers, parents, or government, when is the minister going to change the testing program by developing an ongoing, contextual, broad-based testing system for grade 3 to reflect Alberta Education's education program continuity policy?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the Member for Stony Plain would want to damn teachers across the province

like he's doing when he says that our students in grades 1, 2, and 3, and particularly in 3, are not getting tested as to the progress they're making. I put to the hon. member that teachers are evaluating childrens' progress in an ongoing way. That's exactly what they should be doing, and I support their efforts to do just that. We as a provincial government, require students in grade 3 to be tested – and I believe this year the grade 3 achievement test will be in mathematics – to assess not how individual students are doing but to see how well students and schools and, in fact, school boards and school jurisdictions are doing, one versus another. I am delighted with some of the response we've been getting from some teachers who value that kind of assessment because it's being used to help them improve the quality of the teaching that they're providing to their children.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: The minister wasn't listening. I did say the teachers are doing their jobs. It appears that the minister is out of touch with what the real needs of reporting student progress are. It's clear that Alberta Education's method of imposing testing is wrong and certainly ineffective at the grade 3 level. Given that the current system is so ineffective, is the minister now prepared to work with parent groups, local school boards, and the Early Childhood Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association to develop a meaningful method of testing based on observation and documentation?

MR. DINNING: We are doing just that. The hon. member should know from his experience in schools that in this past year, May 1990, we went beyond the normal paper and pencil testing for grade 3 achievement tests and began assessing childrens' portfolios to look at the work that they've done not just on that paper and pencil test on a given day in May of 1990 but in their previous work throughout the year. What the hon. member is saying, Mr. Speaker, consistent with his party's philosophy, is that they don't want accountability. They don't want to measure children's progress or schools' progress against some standards that we have set out as a provincial government. That's where we differ. We believe that Albertans investing \$2.5 billion in our system of education in this province want accountability. They want to know whether our schools and our students are measuring up, and that is one important job that we must do as a provincial government.

3:10 Workers' Compensation Board

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, the frustration of injured workers with the Workers' Compensation Board in the province of Alberta manifests itself in many ways, whether it's camp-outs at the front of the Legislature or protests in galleries or sometimes, unfortunately, even more tragic ways. Recently the minister received a clear and well-documented case of the administrative abuse of a client and a solicitor where the lawyer for this particular WCB client expressed his frustration in repeatedly trying over a five-month period to get a response from the Appeals Commission after a hearing. Who knows how much longer that would have taken if the client had acted on his own? I want to ask the minister: does he condone this kind of bureaucratic abuse of injured workers, and if not, what is he going to do about it?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I'm disturbed, I'm upset, and I think it's discouraging that the member would ask such a question. Let me explain. [interjections] Let me explain. We

have an independent Appeals Commission, a three-member board. Two members are from labour and one from industry, and they hear the appeals. It takes time to hear these appeals and find out what the other side of those questions are. When you have a lawyer representing a worker, there are things presented that the Appeals Commission has to find out through other sources, whether it's medical information or otherwise. Now, for the hon. member across the way – and he's done this time after time after time. He says, first of all: let's make sure this committee's independent. Then he says: Mr. Minister, it's your fault; get involved. Surely you can't have it both ways. I'm ashamed of him.

MR. GIBEAULT: How about some responsibility and accountability from that minister? He wrote the legislation that created the Appeals Commission. I want to ask this minister a supplementary question. As the minister responsible for the WCB, given that justice delayed is justice denied, when is he going to give some commitment that when workers go to the Appeals Commission, through all that bureaucratic nonsense, they will get an answer within 30 days?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, he sent the letter over to me, and I received this letter. It was dated April 17 when he received it. Why did it take him until May 16 to ask the question? He should now ask this lawyer to give him a copy of the letter he receives from the Appeals Commission when the case has been resolved.

I can't tell the Appeals Commission to do it within 30 days. My advice to the Workers' Compensation Board and to the Appeals Commission is to do it as quickly, as fairly, as honestly as they can, and that's what they're doing. To say otherwise would be wrong.

MR. GIBEAULT: Less than five months. How about 30 days?

MR. SPEAKER: Order. You asked your questions.

MR. TRYNCHY: For the hon. member to suggest that I should become involved to tell the Appeals Commission what to do, how to do it, and when to do it is wrong. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, were you not listening the other day?

Aids to Daily Living Program

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, senior citizens throughout this province are angry and fed up with this government, and rightfully so. Now that same anger is building amongst those persons with disabilities as they learn of this government's plans to eliminate, take away, some of the medical items and supplies that they previously received at no charge to them. I wish I could tell the minister exactly what items are being discontinued from that list, but her own people can't tell us or they won't tell us exactly what those items are. I'm led to believe that there are dozens and dozens, which can become very costly if a person needs a great number of them during the year. I realize that some of the expensive-type items are being added, which is good, but my question to the minister: why are these expensive-type items that are required being done at the expense of those persons that rely on certain types of medical items that are now going to create tremendous hardships?

MS BETKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question is rather vague. The restructuring of the Aids to Daily Living program has certainly been to try and take off some of the lower cost items, remove the deductible that people under 65 were paying under that program, and add some of the higher cost items on at the end. I'm not sure what item the hon. member is referring to. Without that, it's rather difficult to answer his question.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the difficulty is that the minister's own departmental people can't tell us which items are being dropped at this time except that there are going to be dozens of items that are going to be dropped. Some of them have a very low cost, but some of them people may need dozens and dozens of during the year. My second question to the minister: besides the Premier's council which consumer groups did the minister consult with before these changes were made?

MS BETKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the Aids to Daily Living program and the substantial restructuring that we've done. The rule of thumb, if you like, that was used with respect to the low cost items were those that would be available to an Albertan at less than \$150 per year. The hon. member will know that there previously was a deductible in the Aids to Daily Living program of the same amount. That was dropped. The cost sharing for those who could afford to pay was for the area up to \$500 per year per family, and then beyond that there would be no cost sharing because the total costs would be borne by the province. There are lists available. If the hon. member is unable to get them, I'd be happy to supply them to him.

Certainly we worked from a basis of principles. Let's look at an example like incontinence supplies. One of the principles that we used in evaluating the program was to try and promote the use of reusable, recyclable materials as opposed to disposable materials. That is all within the framework of the massive restructuring that's gone on with Aids to Daily Living. The consultation with the Premier's council and with people like professional associations with respect to those changes that could be made safely and correctly were changes that we believe were very, very important in order to make our Aids to Daily Living program now in Alberta one of the most progressive plans outside of the Canada Health Act that exists in any of the provinces.

MR. SPEAKER: Innisfail.

Lambco Privatization

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the Minister of Agriculture has been negotiating the sale of Lambco over the last several months with the successful bidder, Canada West Foods Corp. Can the minister please advise the House on the progress of this negotiation?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise the House that the successful privatization of Lambco is virtually complete.

MR. SEVERTSON: That's good news, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister please comment on the financial return of this sale?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, I certainly can, with pleasure. After 12 years of operating Lambco, with the accumulated profits that accrued plus part of the contribution toward the purchase price, we got \$4.9 million plus an additional \$1 and a half million in a

vendor loan, which is part of our golden share to ensure that the plant continues to serve the sheep and veal industry. By the time we pay back the outstanding debt to the Ag Development Corporation that's been on the books since we acquired it, general revenue will get \$3.3 million in cash, and \$1 and half million will flow in under the vendor loan over the years to come.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, we're probing the shifting sands of the environmental impact assessment policy. In the space of a week the Minister of the Environment told the Assembly that there is an environmental impact assessment on Sunpine Forest Products; he told the *Edmonton Journal* there is no environmental impact assessment; he told the Red Deer *Advocate* that no decision has been made. So you take your pick of any position, and he's got it. Yesterday the project manager of the Swan Hills expansion project stated that the public response to their meetings was so paltry that no public hearings will be required on the project. It makes you wonder why the project manager is in a position to make a statement like that. Will the minister state to the House whether or not he will grant Albertans a formal EIA and public hearings through the Natural Resources Conservation Board on the Swan Hills expansion?

3:20

MR. KLEIN: First of all, I never talked to the Red Deer *Advocate*. I really didn't talk to the Red Deer *Advocate*.

MR. MARTIN: Are you sure, Ralph?

MR. KLEIN: Absolutely. Right. Maybe the hon. member was talking to the Red Deer *Advocate* and got himself a little mixed up.

With respect to the Swan Hills expansion, Mr. Speaker, I've indicated to the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation that this is a project that would be submitted to the Natural Resources Conservation Board.

MR. McINNIS: I should clarify that. I believe it was his department that said to the *Advocate* that no decision had been made. [interjections] Okay. The minister has two positions, and the department has yet another position.

Will the minister confirm that there will be public hearings through the NRCB process on the Swan Hills expansion?

MR. KLEIN: Well, that's exactly my point, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hon. member said that I was talking to the Red Deer *Advocate*; I wasn't talking to the Red Deer *Advocate*. The hon. member said that I said this. Then he finally says: no, it wasn't the minister who said this; it was someone in the department who said this. Well, listen, hon. member, because I'm going to tell you: what I said to the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation is simply that this project will go to the NRCB. Are you satisfied?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister, but I'm afraid you're not supposed to ask questions of the opposition.

head:

Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[Motion carried]

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Thank you.
Drayton Valley, Attorney General, Lesser Slave Lake.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

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

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 53 bright young students from the Evergreen school in Drayton Valley. They're accompanied today by Mr. Robert Christopherson, a teacher; Mr. Roger Smeland, a teacher; and a parent, Mrs. Barb Paynton. I would ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this House while they're here.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House 84 bright seniors from Camrose and Wetaskiwin constituencies. I regret that I didn't have the opportunity to talk to them before the House convened. I hope to after. I'll ask that they stand or wave and that the House accord the usual welcome to them.

MR. SPEAKER: Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me today to introduce two different groups of students. One group has come from a long way up in the north. From the Peerless Lake school we've got nine students. Accompanying them are Mr. Fraser Green, Mr. Jim Wilkinson, and Mrs. Wilkinson. I ask that they stand and receive a very warm welcome from this Assembly.

The other group that I'd like to introduce, and I think they've just left, is from St. Andrews school. There were 37 in the group, and they were sitting in the public gallery. They were accompanied by Mr. Robert Pardell as well as Mrs. Carol Lowery and Mrs. Darlene Johnson. I think they've left, so I don't think we have to ask them to stand, but if you could please just give them a warm welcome anyway.

head: **Written Questions**

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions other than Question 356 stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

NovAtel Communications Ltd.

356. Mr. Bruseker asked the government the following question:
- (1) How much of the \$525 million loan guarantee extended to NovAtel Communications Ltd. by the government on January 11, 1991, has been drawn upon as of March 31, 1991, and
 - (2) with respect to the above-mentioned loan guarantee, is the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications required to give his approval for NovAtel to make use of the loan guarantee?

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, that question is not acceptable.

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would move that motions for returns other than Motions 211, 229, and 236 stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

Reforestation

211. On behalf of Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Bruseker moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing any studies that have been carried out by or for the government on the capacity of government and private nurseries to provide suitable trees for reforestation of the forest management areas of Alberta scheduled to be logged each year and also to replant those areas where earlier planting was not viable or not carried out for some other reason.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in making a few comments to that particular motion, the information requested here really deals with what may be a discrepancy between the amount of seedlings that are produced versus the amount of seedlings that are required given the increase in logging and the removal of trees in our forests in the province. What we're looking for here is some indication from the government that we are going to be able to produce sufficient seedlings through private nurseries, government nurseries, or from whatever source so that in fact once those trees are taken by Daishowa or Al-Pac or whichever mill or the sawmills, we've got some trees to replace the ones that are harvested.

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, the motion for a return asks for studies on our capability and our strategy to deal with the demand for tree seedlings for reforestation. I'm sure it surprises no one in the House that my department's been seeking the best advice possible to ensure that we develop the optimal seedling strategy that we can for the province of Alberta. I'm quite happy to share those studies with all members of the Legislature, but I'm concerned that the wording in the motion for a return describes too limited a term of reference that we didn't set.

The motion tries to narrow the studies down to forest management areas and the areas that are not currently up to standard, and our seedling strategy has to be responsive to every type of demand. For that reason, we asked our consultants to be all encompassing in the review of the future seedling requirements that were needed for the province, and as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we will gladly share this information with all members. I do propose to amend the motion for a return by deleting the words:

of the forest management areas of Alberta scheduled to be logged each year and also to replant those areas where earlier planting was not viable or not carried out for some other reason,

and by substituting the words:

in order to meet the projected total provincial demand of 103 million seedlings by 1995.

It'll be much broader. I would be happy to accept it with the amendment to the motion and to file it as soon as possible.

MR. McINNIS: I'm not certain that the amendment does really broaden the scope of the motion for a return. Unfortunately, the member who moved the motion is not in his place today, but it seems to me that what he's trying to obtain is information about the potential demand for seedlings in the province of Alberta, which may be covered by the projected demand of 103 million seedlings by 1995 or it may not. There is, as has been mentioned recently in this Assembly, a very large volume of forest lands which are not adequately restocked in the sense that

there are not viable populations of target species of trees on those lands. There are lands that I've personally looked at, on a tour from the Weldwood people, which have passed the reforestation check as it was prior to last November. You have seedlings that are there, but they are so deeply buried beneath the undercover that they're not growing at all. Somebody has to at some point bear the expense and the burden of reforesting those lands. [interjection] What's your problem?

MR. SPEAKER: Through the Chair, hon. members.

MR. McINNIS: So the question is really whether the backlog is adequately covered by the projected demand of 103 million seedlings or not. The motion as originally crafted does ask for both areas where reforestation activities are going to take place in terms of future harvesting: those that the companies are responsible for under the November Free to Grow standards as well as the lands that the provincial government is responsible for. It's my understanding that the provincial government is responsible for all of the FMA lands which passed the old standard but are not performing. It's now our responsibility as taxpayers to do whatever reforestation and silviculture is required. The province took over responsibility for the quota lands under the terms that they negotiated under the Free to Grow standards. They essentially took back the responsibility for any quota lands that were harvested prior to November, and of course that's the projected \$20 million figure. Now, if you add the FMA lands that are in disrepair and the quota lands that are in disrepair, it's many, many millions of hectares and I suggest many, many millions of dollars and probably a bigger demand for seedlings. It does seem to me that the motion as originally crafted has a broader reach than the narrower figure of 103 million, so for that reason I'm speaking against the amendment.

3:30

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West, on the amendment.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes; certainly, Mr. Speaker. Just to the amendment, I am pleased to see that the minister is prepared to make a commitment to answer this. I just am a little concerned about that number of 103 million, and I'm wondering if there is going to be information as well that tells us how that figure of 103 million was reached in the discussion paper, because I think that's important as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Call for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion as amended carried]

Herbicide in Forests

229. Mr. McInnis moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports and studies prepared by or for the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife on the use of chemical herbicides in forest management and reforestation activities since April 1, 1989.

MR. McINNIS: I am anticipating that the minister will amend the motion; in fact, he was kind enough to provide an advance copy of the amendment. The amendment seeks to insert the word "public" prior to the main substance of the motion.

Now, this is a very important issue, and a raging debate is taking place largely in-house within the confines of the Department of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. To this point in time there are some interested parties in the province who are making submissions, who communicate, I'm certain, with the minister. They do with me and probably with other members of this Assembly. I think the controversy does need to come out into the open to some degree, because Albertans have a stake in knowing what type of chemistry will be applied to the forests in the future. What we've struggled for and what we've needed to this point in time is some mechanism so that that debate can take place. I think a necessary first step is to have information – studies and reports – laid on the table so that they can be reviewed, and that's the reason the request was put forward.

I spoke recently at a conference of the Industrial Vegetation Management Association in Banff. A lot of people from the minister's department were there as well. They're quite interested in the subject of herbicide use because vegetation management and herbicides are one and the same, and very many people in the forest industry were there. I was asked for my position on the issue. I think they're kind of wondering, you know, when there will be a policy decision made, because most of them seemed to feel that herbicides would be quite useful. I said that I got a lot of information from people who have concerns in opposition but not a lot from proponents. The other thing I said is that this seems to me to be the kind of issue that the new Natural Resources Conservation Board should have a look at, and there was a surprising amount of support for that notion from the forest industry people. I think we're perhaps beginning the process of getting this out in the public, and having all of the reports and studies on the table would be a good beginning to that.

I'm a little troubled by the reason to put the word "public" in there. Does that mean "already made public," in which case I would be asking for something that's available from another source, which is kind of out of order. I'm hoping that when he moves the amendment, the minister will explain the reasons why he wants to insert that word.

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I propose to amend the motion by adding the word "public" after the words "a copy of all," and preceding the words "reports and studies prepared by or for." I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. There's been a concern overall with some of the motions with respect to the use of the word "all" because once it's accepted by the Assembly, it becomes an order of the Assembly. The words "all reports" – I personally would want to make absolutely sure that we're talking about any reports that were paid for by public funds, that were done by the department. I don't want internal documents to be called for that are advice to me from my deputy minister or something like that. That's what I want to make absolutely clear.

To answer clearly the hon. member, his question's a good one. Why would he ask for reports that are already public? It's my intention to provide any reports or studies that we have, but I wanted to make absolutely sure that it was reports that fall within that category, and that was the reason for the amendment.

With that I would ask all members to support the amended motion.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: On the amendment, although to some degree the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place was referring ahead of time. On the amendment.

MR. McINNIS: Well, I'm taking from the minister's comment that what he means is "prepared at public expense." I have no problem with that at all. Can I subamend just to make those words? Rather than just the word, "public," "at public expense." It actually should go in a different place.

MR. SPEAKER: On the subamendment?

MR. McINNIS: It's actually not subamendable. I have no difficulty with what he's saying; I just think it could be worded in a slightly more comprehensive fashion. But what the heck; life's full of compromises.

MR. SPEAKER: So hon. members are totally aware, we're not on a subamendment. What are we on?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: The amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: We are on the amendment. Is that taken as your understanding? All right.

Additional speakers to the amendment? If not, call for the question.

[Motion as amended carried]

Wildlife Studies in Green Zone

236. Mr. McInnis moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing

- (1) a list of all studies prepared or initiated by the Department of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife on wildlife habitat or wildlife resources in the green zone since April 1, 1989, and
- (2) a copy of all studies referred to in the reply to (1) which have been completed as of March 14, 1991.

MR. McINNIS: Again, this is a motion to seek an update of some material that was tabled by the minister I believe two years ago. It's simply what research has been done; in the first instance, what's been initiated, and secondly, any of those that happen to be in complete form, if they could be tabled in the Assembly. It's about the important matter of identifying critical wildlife habitat. I'm assuming that this motion would include the Westworth & Associates report, which is presently before the minister, dealing with the Al-Pac FMA area, because I'm certain that they would be looking at wildlife habitat.

Again I would suggest to the minister that he use the term "at public expense" rather than simply the word "public" in his amendment, if he's able to do that.

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I propose to amend Motion 236 by adding the word "public" after the words "a list of all" and preceding the words "studies prepared or initiated," and two, by adding the word "public" after the words "a copy of all" and preceding the words "studies referred to."

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place again. It's difficult to know how to amend it. I certainly want to provide any and all studies. There's not any question about that. I think there may be some further discussion on other motions that are on the Order Paper

on maybe better terminology to use that would meet those qualifications. I might say that I've made it absolutely clear that it's my intention to provide all those public studies. I believe in keeping my word. He can refer to *Hansard*, and what we'll do is try, maybe jointly, to come up with better ways to phrase in the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move the amendment to Motion 236.

[Motion as amended carried]

3:40

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

head: Members' Statements

214. Moved by Mr. Severtson:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly consider the inclusion of members' statements as an order of business on Tuesday and/or Thursday afternoons.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Innisfail.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce Motion 214. Many members present in the Assembly today are aware of the goals and objectives of this motion, so I'll try not to take up too much time with my introductory remarks.

One of the key reasons that I entered politics was because I strongly believed in serving the people who live in the same region as I do with the best possible political representation. It's with this view of enhancing the ability to represent his or her constituency that I am introducing the motion to include members' statements period in the Orders of the Day schedule.

In preparing this motion, I've reflected on the many different ways that government MLAs contribute to the political debates that affect Albertans. We try hard to be effective spokesmen for our constituents on the committees we chair and serve on, in the questions we ask in question period, and during the many legislative debates on the Order Paper, such as this one, or during estimates or on the throne speech debate. I know that for many members of this caucus open and frank debate is encouraged, and the debate is always interesting because this party represents the views and concerns of Albertans from every corner of this great province. This motion is really a logical continuation of this government's desire to fully and completely represent Albertans in this Assembly.

Basically, what I am proposing is a designated period for any MLA to stand up and make a brief statement on an issue of concern to his or her constituency. I believe that a members' statements period would be another positive way for MLAs to contribute to the overall legislative system, and it will bring with it more responsibility and accountability to our jobs as MLAs.

There's also another need for this motion. Mr. Speaker, slowly but surely the opposition parties in this Assembly are compromising the Standing Orders by making members' statements in the House during question period. Question period is for questions and answers, not statements, but time and time again government members must sit and listen to the opposition go on and on and on in their preambles making wild accusations and then finishing their diatribe off with a question mark. Then, after ignoring the answer, they take off on another speech during their supplementary. Some of the opposition don't think that's going on. I would like to refresh their memory. The opposition was quoted in *Hansard* on May 1. During his supplementary the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Kingsway was cut off by you, Mr. Speaker, because he was going on on another long-winded speech. The member's response to the Speaker's ruling was, and I would like to quote page 916: "It was a statement. . . . I made a statement not a question." Those are his words, and I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Kingsway for helping me prove my point. This flagrant abuse of question period must come to an end. By including a members' statements period in the Orders of the Day schedule, this Assembly would have a designated time for MLAs to make their statements. It's a supplementary intention of this motion but an important one nonetheless.

Mr. Speaker, members' statements periods are practised in many other jurisdictions. Before I get into the details of my proposal, let me highlight some of the features practised elsewhere. In the House of Commons there is a members' statements period at 2 p.m. Monday through Thursday and on Friday at 11 a.m. for 15 minutes each day. The need for a members' statements period came about through a 1982 Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure. It was unanimously accepted by the House on a one-year experimental basis. The impact of the members' statements period was so positive that it is now a permanent part of the Orders of the Day.

British Columbia has members' statements every Friday, seven minutes each for up to one hour. The Northwest Territories has one on opening day of each session. Ontario Members' Statements period is the first proceeding each day, 90 seconds, up to three members from each party. In New Brunswick the members are permitted to make a 90-second statement before question period for a 10-minute time limit. In Prince Edward Island a member can speak on any matter for two minutes, one member per day. These six jurisdictions have incorporated members' statements into their daily routines on a permanent basis because it's a type of parliamentary forum that all sides find useful and valuable. It's working well. MLAs take their statements seriously and they present them succinctly, and question periods are for questions, not speeches.

Mr. Speaker, what I've tried to do is pull together the best features of members' statements periods from other Assemblies and bring them together in this motion. Before I present the details of this motion, I should state that I look forward to the debate in this Assembly, and I'm open to certain amendments. I believe it's important to flesh out as many ideas on this issue as possible.

First of all, members' statements period would fall on Tuesday or Thursday because this is when we do private members' business. I personally feel that Tuesday would be the best time, as Thursday is the only day for private members' Bills. The members' statements period could come right after Ministerial Statements and just before question period. The members' statements period would last six minutes with a maximum of four speakers. I believe that a minute and a half is plenty of time, and it is the average length in other jurisdictions. Each Member of the Legislative Assembly will be granted 90 seconds to make his or her statement. Rebuttals or comments on statements will not be permitted because these statements are not designed for debate. B.C. is the only province to have responses to statements, but they also devote an hour to members' statements. I feel we just don't have that time.

I also believe that it is a good idea to introduce members' statements period into the Orders of the Day schedule on a trial basis for one complete session. After it has been practised for a term, a special select committee of the Legislature could be

struck or the House leaders through their caucuses could evaluate the effectiveness of the members' statements period.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, there are skeptics, like the opposition, who make it their job to be skeptics. They'll say that this motion does not go far enough, but I believe this motion is a balanced approach to parliamentary reform. First of all, we can't introduce this motion on a permanent basis right away because we cannot be sure just how effective it will be. Let's face it: the opposition likes to hear themselves speak, and it's not the intention of this motion to provide a soapbox for opposition members to ramble on all day.

AN HON. MEMBER: You sure don't like opposition, do you?

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. SEVERTSON: By bringing this motion in on a trial basis, we can see how well it will work in this Assembly. A members' statements period is designed to enhance the ability of the MLA to represent his or her constituents. Let us remove ourselves from the partisan bickering that sometimes takes over and think of what is best for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I urge all members present today to accept this motion as a positive step towards balancing legislative reform.

Thank you.

3:50

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this motion, probably the first private member's motion sponsored by a government member that I've supported in a long time.

I'd like to give a little background to this motion. It is something that I started talking about in 1986 with the hon. Neil Crawford, who was at that time Government House Leader. I raised it with him and with subsequent House leaders along with a number of other reforms that I have since continued to pursue with the Government House Leader, some of which, perhaps, may become the rules governing the House.

I feel sorry, however, that the member sponsoring the motion, who said that he would like to remove some of the partisanship in the Assembly, has himself unnecessarily participated in just that kind of nonsense. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that he says that one of the purposes, an important but not the fundamental purpose, for a members' statements period would be to reduce the use of question period by the opposition as a basis upon which members' statements can be sponsored. I challenge this because, as the member well knows as a government member who asks questions in question period himself with preambles, every MLA entitled to ask questions, which is virtually everybody but Executive Council members, uses question period as a way to both present information and ask questions. You'll find that the opposition in Alberta is no different from the opposition in any parliamentary democracy and, I can assure the member, neither are the government members any different. I will not dignify the arguments that he presented thereafter by responding to them because I believe this motion should come to a vote. It is something we have asked for years, and I hope it does come to a vote and a successful one at that.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

I would like to address briefly, Mr. Speaker, some of the other reforms that the Official Opposition New Democrats have also proposed and hope, in this moment of what may be agreement on all sides of the House, to get on the record in a way that they've not been on the record before for nonpartisan consideration. One which we've been proposing, again since 1986, is the striking of committees, as is done in the House of Commons, on broad policy areas for the purposes of studying Bills, motions, and estimates as presented by the government. The argument has been given back to me that that may be a waste of time because what happens is they still have to be voted on by the Assembly. That is possibly true, but they tend not to come back in controversial form unless they are of particular contention. In other words, only the most controversial elements of a Bill, a motion, or a government estimate will come back for debate to the entire Assembly. Generally what happens is that they are thoroughly worked through by the members on the committee. All we need is three or four committees of this Assembly. The government has often made the case, "Gee, we'd like to spend more time doing government business." I have no objection to that, and I offer this as one means by which the whole House can get down to more government business more often.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

The other benefit of pursuing this legislative option is that the members who are most interested in the material in a broad subject area would, if we removed the closure limitations in our Standing Orders, have a lot more time for scrutiny of the matter in front of them, especially those who, as I say, have a strong interest in a particular policy area. So there's one other that I would like members to consider.

Another one that we have ordinarily dealt with on an annual basis through you, Mr. Speaker, is the structure of question period and the number of supplementary questions that are allowed. We went two years ago to a system of the leaders of the opposition parties being entitled to one main question with two supplementaries for each of their entitlements and then one question and one supplementary for everybody else. It is true that more MLAs are able to participate in question period as a result, but it is also true that MLAs need to use question period basically to get some stuff on the record for their constituents. If we have this motion passed today, we will accomplish that. I would suggest, then, that as a consequential event we should look at adding one supplementary for the nonleader questions and the leader questions to restore, basically, the format that we had before. We may find that equally workable.

There is another thing that I'd like to raise in this context, and that is something that is done in Westminster. Members will find reference to it in *Beauchesne's* rules under citation 470. That is a question and comment period. Mr. Speaker, for the first time, I believe in the fall of 1990, we started doing something quite interesting in the course of estimates and in other debates. As you know, there is a parliamentary rule that says that the person recognized has the floor. We have allowed, and I think with very amicable understandings, for the person who's got the floor to cede when another person indicates that a question is desirable. Generally it is understood that the person to whom the floor is ceded will not abuse that, because theoretically it could be abused and it hasn't been abused. The member wanting to pose a question has done so, resumed their place, and the member originally speaking rises again and chooses whether or not to answer the question put.

Well, there is a technique for this that is available in other Houses of Commons and Legislatures, and that is this reference that I've made, the question and comment period, which can follow certain debates. We could even decide which kind of debates would be allowed for this and which kind would not, and this, too, would facilitate, I think, some interesting dialogue. For the first time since I've been elected in 1986, I do see minor changes outside of the most acrimonious event of the day, which is inevitably question period, in terms of seeking information and challenging each other on what you're really saying or what you're really avoiding. I like to see this, because I think we can develop our House in a way that engenders a genuine exchange of ideas rather than simply political and partisan posturing.

Now that I've brought up some of the other stuff – and there have been other ideas that I've discussed on behalf of my New Democrat colleagues with the succession of House leaders that have occurred since 1986. I must say the Government House Leader did alert me that this was coming or possibly coming – he's a very careful man – before we got our first Order Paper. I am very pleased that it is being sponsored. I for one want to make sure that we get to the vote today on this matter because I'd like to try it out.

4:00

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address a couple of the specifics the sponsoring member identified. He suggested that we try it on Tuesdays alone, and I suppose strategically it would be in the best interest of the government to try it that way. I would like to try it on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I propose as an alternative to a 15-minute period on Tuesdays alone that we go to a nine- or 11-minute period twice a week, which doesn't take a lot more time but may give an opportunity for members to respond to things that are happening either in their area of particular interest, expertise, or constituency on a slightly more frequent basis. I understand the member said he was open to amendment on this. I don't wish to amend. I don't want to get caught up in an amendment right now because I want to make sure this comes to a vote and I want to make sure that everybody else interested has a chance to speak prior to that vote, but I would suggest we do it that way. I'm sure the House leaders may be able to come to an agreement on this if the motion passes, and I presume that's the way it will go.

The member says let's try it for one sitting, and I'm certainly happy with that. If it doesn't work, let's revise it; let's work on it, okay? I am not in favour of any special select committee being established to review its efficacy. I think that's a waste. There's a reason you have House leaders, Mr. Speaker, and that is to negotiate things like this. By and large, I would say our negotiations, if not successful in the result, are ordinarily conducted in a professional manner. On that note, I would like to recognize the professionalism and goodwill expressed by the House leaders with whom I've been dealing since 1986, especially the Hon. Neil Crawford, who has been subsequently struck by an unfortunate disease and whose presence I do miss; also the former Technology, Research and Telecommunications minister, Les Young, with whom co-operation could be predicted at most times, although there was one occasion when it certainly was not and that was a certain closure event, but he and I can laugh about it now; and the current Government House Leader, who is also Deputy Premier, Jim Horsman.

I think by and large the government House leaders selected by the Premier have been very responsible people and have at least been open to ideas. I've not always been successful in selling my ideas to them, and they are in the comfortable

position of not having to sell their ideas to me because they know they've got the votes on their side; nonetheless, they do not tend to rub that fact in. They have been, I think, quite responsible and co-operative in that position, and I would like at this point to thank the Government House Leader for any work he may have done to get this particular motion on the Order Paper, thank the member who is sponsoring it, and suggest that at this time it's not useful to amend this motion; it is much more useful to pass it and get on with it.

You have the support of the New Democrat caucus. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus I also am pleased to support this motion. I think such a practice would certainly relieve a sense of frustration many of us have in that there are not many opportunities where we can rise in this Assembly and express the views our constituents have about special issues of concern specifically to them and sometimes also the views of a minority of our constituents, who also want us to be their voice in this Assembly.

I will not quibble about the details as presented by the hon. Member for Innisfail, but I do, however, take exception to the mover's generalization that members use question period as a way of making speeches. Some members do that, certainly not all, and not all of those who do are necessarily in the opposition. Quite often we see people on the government side through an answer also giving a speech. So it is not fair to make that generalization.

I also have to take exception to the fact that the member does not seem to understand the role of the opposition and that in a democracy it is specifically the opposition's task to bring to this House those gaps that exist in certain services, those flaws that exist in the system, those areas where constituents and Albertans at large have expressed concern. It is our role to bring those forward. The only opportunity we have usually is through question period.

Having expressed those concerns and having indicated that the member has made some sweeping generalizations, I would again reiterate that we will support this move to reform. As a caucus we also have a reform package that we are talking about to our supporters. We've talked frequently and have received a lot of support for the whole concept of free votes. We're talking about reform of the budgeting process, talking about giving the Public Accounts Committee the authority to do much more than it is able to do at the present time. We have talked about minority reports. There is a whole list of things that we would like to see as a way of reforming procedures in this Assembly to make the Assembly more responsive to the plurality that exists out there. The Member for Innisfail may not realize it, but everyone in this province is not necessarily a supporter of his government any longer, and with plurality, with opposition comes the fact that in this Assembly the member will hear views that are not the views of his government. He should welcome those views; that's what democracy is all about.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to elaborate on what he means by the words "to consider," when he sums up. Does he mean that this debate is the consideration that will be given to this motion? Is he suggesting that a process be set up to give another body, maybe the House leaders, maybe someone else, the opportunity to consider the motion? In any case, I think it would be a good move. It would certainly provide

individual members with an opportunity to express the views of their constituents.

I support it, and I thank the member for bringing this motion forward.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising here today to support this motion, too, but after listening to the last speaker, I'm not quite sure whether or not we should support it, because this government does listen to people. There isn't anywhere where you can get 2.4 million people agreeing with everything government does, and we're quite aware of that. I know a number of my constituents that are not too favourable and in agreement with some of the things that the Liberal Party does as well, so I think those kinds of comments by the member across the way were uncalled for.

I just really feel, Mr. Speaker, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly elected since 1986, too, that I would like to commend you for the job that you do and the role that you play in this Assembly. I think that we as members have had a great opportunity to be able to express the views of our constituents through our throne speech and through our budget presentations and other ways, but as we go on and the House continues to deal with House business, there are times when members are not given enough time to be able to express the views of their constituents. Even when we are able to present motions like this and private members' Bills, we don't have time to be able to get to all of them, so it would be nice to be able to express our constituents' views for just a few minutes, to be able to stand up and give the views of all of our constituents in a positive manner, not to be able to hash away at Liberals' views versus government views.

I believe this motion is innovative and progressive. I understand that other provinces have done this, and it has been quite successful. I'd like to focus on the important role that we play and how much we take advantage of opportunities to be able to serve our constituents in the Legislative Assembly in the best way that we know. The role of a private member, as we all know, is to represent our own constituents. That is what they expect us to do. As a private member I feel really great about being able to express the views and concerns of my constituents. Last night, for instance, I had a town hall meeting in Calgary-Glenmore, as I do every month, and it is wonderful to be able to come back to the House and be able to talk about views that were expressed, because the press certainly doesn't pick up the positive; they'll only report the very negative. It is, I think, important for my constituents to know exactly the activities of Members of the Legislative Assembly and what they are doing in their constituency and for their constituents.

4:10

Part of that primary responsibility is to conscientiously pursue the best interests of the province and to remain in touch with everybody, with local issues and concerns and to bring them forward. With a city like Calgary and having 13 government MLAs, we as a Calgary caucus have the opportunity to meet a number of groups frequently. They bring their concerns in that way. We have a method where we come back to our caucus. We express the views of those constituents at large as well. I think a forum such as this which the Member for Innisfail is presenting before this House is a good way for us to bring views back as a Calgary caucus.

For each of us the representation of views of our constituents, as I mentioned, goes back to our bigger caucus. We as members of various committees in this House also have a chance to sit in

on a number of committees and listen to many, many presentations provincially as well, not just our own constituents, not just our own city or town but also to listen to a number of presentations and listen to people from all over the province so that we can collectively come to a consensus whereby we do contribute to policy-making of this government. That's how we develop policies, and that's how we develop budget and focus our attention on what the people of Alberta are telling us. Every member of our caucus has an equal voice; there is absolutely no distinction between the private members or cabinet. We all don't necessarily agree on every issue, but we certainly have an opportunity to discuss our views, to bring back our constituents' views, and to review all of the issues in detail and have support of our cabinet ministers. By incorporating the standpoint of our constituents into each discussion, we ensure that our final policies reflect the views of those Albertans we represent.

Private members also stand in this Legislature to introduce their own Bills and motions, as I've already mentioned. Being able to discuss these to the great extent that we do is very important, but there isn't enough time, as I mentioned before, to deal with every one of them.

We should be proud of the fact that in this Legislature any member may introduce his or her own legislation to be debated in this House. From my understanding, not all provinces have this opportunity that we enjoy in this Assembly. Again, the Bills and motions provide an excellent forum to voice opinions of our electorate, and this kind of a debate we're having now is invaluable. It isn't often, actually, that I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Since I don't recall her bringing this motion before, in '86, I am pleased that she does agree with this concept. I believe, however, that members have to sit down in the House to figure out how this can be done in a constructive manner and how it can be worked through with the Speaker and with the Legislative Assembly rules and directions.

The committee system that we have in the Alberta Legislature again is a very effective vehicle of expression for our members. The committee system even of all parties that will be going out in another couple of weeks to discuss the Constitution for Alberta is a prime example of how open this government is and how they have included members opposite to go out to the people and listen to the people and hear what individuals in all constituencies have to say about our Constitution.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not at first, Dianne. We should beat you over the head with that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

MRS. MIROSH: Maybe you will, member opposite.

I think it's important for all of us of all parties to get out to our constituents. I've had the opportunity again to have a town hall meeting regarding our constitutional views in Alberta. They're really welcoming the idea of this type of a committee so that each constituent with their own individual views can come to a committee like this – it's very democratic – and express their views and we come back to this Legislature and develop a system and develop a policy that we can send to our federal counterparts. We have had a committee of all parties, and electoral boundaries is a good example, that has gone out all over Alberta to listen to the people of Alberta and come to some consensus. Again, we don't always agree with one another, but I know for a fact that the people of Alberta certainly have had a chance, a great opportunity, to express their views, and the committee has listened. Therefore, we now have this

legislation that has been passed for committees to look at our boundaries.

The committees that I spoke on before, the ones that I chair – the economic caucus committee, even the Committee on Professions and Occupations, and being on the Education caucus committee and a number of other committees – have really allowed people of this province to express every view in their thoughts and their ideas. Every time we meet with a group of people, we do react and we do respond and we do debate. These committees meet with the general public and with many, many, many associations on many occasions, and meet with organizations and interest groups that want to address our current policies, programs, and legislation. We have to have this as an ongoing process because the world is changing rapidly and we have to keep up with the times and with the views of people from all walks of life.

By sitting on these committees, we are fulfilling a very important role of listening to the public at large and condensing and assimilating those views to be passed out to the government and have our cabinet ministers react. Taking part in chairing caucus committees also ensures us in a specialized way that the views of Albertans that we represent and hear from are part of our party policy process. I earlier had a motion before this House about public participation, and I believe very strongly that we the government certainly have many avenues for this public participation. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is a good example, with his Landlord and Tenant Act. He sent a task force out, and they traveled throughout the province and listened to a number of views on both sides. I attended public meetings on his behalf, as well, to address our Landlord and Tenant Act and put together a comprehensive piece of legislation that is now before this House for debate. This piece of legislation for debate also gives Albertans a chance to be able to comment and get involved in the Landlord and Tenant Act, and I commend the minister for the process that he has used.

Speaking as a private government member, I know that our caucus committee responsibilities are taken very seriously and that these committees provide forums to get very involved, and they take a lot of time. The topics of interest and all of the interest groups come from the grass roots, and those are the people that we certainly listen to. We all have an important role in our committees, and again I emphasize that we do take these submissions very seriously. We each have our different views, and we bring them forward on behalf of our constituents. As I say, we don't always agree. One end of Alberta is very different from the other, and the two cities, Edmonton and Calgary, are very different and far apart as well, and certainly I can attest to the fact that Calgarians still don't support the Oilers.

4:20

MR. MAIN: Order. Order.

MRS. MIROSH: I don't know that we'll ever come together on that.

We do have a lot of differences. In our political rivalry as well we sometimes, not always that frequently, come to a consensus, even with our Edmonton government members. It's very important that we do this so that we can help Edmonton along, so that we can get some more of our government members in Edmonton.

I'd like to just address question period, as well, as an avenue that we have as members . . .

MR. MAIN: Goodbye.

MRS. MIROSH: Yeah, goodbye is right. We have to make sure that we listen to more Edmontonians, obviously, to get them to swing over to the right side.

I really want to get back to the idea of question period. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure glad you're listening carefully, because we as government members, private members, don't feel that we have an opportunity to be able to get all of the issues of our constituents out during question period. As you have expressed, that is a time where opposition members can debate with our ministers and ask questions, but this is not exactly the time where we as government members can get a lot of the issues out that concern our individual constituents. We do commend you that we do have 20 percent of the time used for question period and that the participation by government members actually, from what I understand, during question period is one of the highest in the country. So I guess we're doing very well there. I don't object to that. None of us here, I believe, objects to that. If we're allowed to give Motion 214 and address the 90-second – however long; certainly not 90 minutes, but a minute, two minutes' – time to be able to address our constituents' views publicly, I'm sure not going to stand here and knock the opposition questions that we have to listen to ad nauseam. I wouldn't do that. I think you need that opportunity to express yourselves. I think we give it to you, and we give it to you fairly.

MS BARRETT: You give it to us?

MRS. MIROSH: Sometimes the Member for Edmonton-Highlands gets a little carried away, especially when the TVs are on, but I think you need that. You need all the help you can get.

I want to just get back to how private members again can get into discussion and express their constituents' views. As I mentioned before, the throne speech and the budget estimates are areas that we can debate for half an hour, but you know, Mr. Speaker, you acknowledge a private member for the government side and then two of the opposition. So they in fact get an hour; we only get a half an hour. It's all right. I mean, they need it. They need all the help they can get, and we're not complaining. It's just that by the time we've debated the throne speech and the budget speech, not all the members here have had an opportunity to speak to each one because of the time constraints we have. I think this again just emphasizes why we couldn't just stand up for a minute and a half and address those issues. During these debates it's quite unique, because private members can get up on their feet and talk about their constituents and all the achievements that the private members, the government members have in planning and priorities, and the significance of all of these different ways of contributing as members and representing our constituents should not be overlooked. The structure in place allows us to fulfill important parts of our roles here, and it is a responsibility given to each of us to make use of in the most effective way possible.

All of us can, however, do more as private members to be more effective representatives. We can always do better. Outside of the House we all have a number of responsibilities. We're able to speak to various groups, make statements on behalf of our constituents to the media, or have, as I mentioned, town hall meetings or these open forums. We each have our own personal way of getting to our constituents and discussing many issues and policies as government members, but where do we have a forum within this House really to address issues of concern or importance to ourselves and our constituents in a timely manner? Even though, as I mentioned, we're able to

speak to the throne speech, the budget speech, and so on, every day there's a different issue. By the time I'm able to get to the throne speech, the issue of that particular day is passé. Every day there are new and different issues that we would like to be able to express in this House and be able to do it in a timely manner. Of course, we all know that Bills and motions cannot be used for every single occasion and every issue every day, because they may not come up when the issue has arisen.

There are often issues that require no comment from the minister, no legislation, nor an expression of direction from the entire Assembly. I don't know if this has ever happened, but some days none of us will have anything to say about the issue of the day. But I doubt that would ever happen.

This is the time for a members' statements period. The hon. Member for Innisfail, I believe, in his views and words has expressed exactly how many of us here do feel, and I commend him for that. This would be a logical extension of what already exists for MLAs. Many other jurisdictions are also taking this approach. This motion would allow us, too, on a trial basis perhaps, to expand our capacities in our roles as elected members. This change would also provide Albertans with the additional effective representation that they deserve. It allows us to bring back what we as members have heard from the public and public representation. Allowing each of us the 90 seconds to speak for the record on an issue of concern or interest for our constituents takes a moderate approach to bringing our full role as MLAs full circle. I think this is important for us and for our constituents. In conclusion, members' statements should be final.

This, Mr. Speaker, I believe is a small step to satisfy a mandate to speak and for our constituents to listen to us. It enables us to advertise to our constituents as well to listen to what we're doing on a day-to-day basis. It brings full attention. I know many of my constituents who have watched question period have been very bored, and they would really like a 90-second clip. I think we would have the attention of our viewers and our constituents and people in Alberta.

In view of the hour, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion carried.

Housing Availability

215. Moved by Mr. Ewasiuk:

Be it resolved that in recognition of the importance of having an adequate supply of affordable housing in Alberta, the Assembly urge the government to ensure that the supply of affordable accommodation is improved and that the cost of both rental and owner-occupied accommodation is not unfairly increased as a result of shortages, including: the introduction of legislation to protect tenants' rights and provide for rent review where vacancies are low; a commitment from Municipal Affairs' housing branch to ensure the provision of low-cost housing accommodation; a commitment to co-operate with not-for-profit and co-operative

housing agencies to fund housing alternatives; the encouragement of the renovation of industrial, commercial, and school properties to affordable, quality housing; the implementation of a tax to apply to profits made through the sale of nonowner-occupied residential properties or multiple-unit residential complexes sold within two years of purchase; and a commitment to protect Albertans from high interest rates on residential accommodation.

MR. EWASIUK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise to the motion. I have introduced similar ones over the last several sessions, and I think that again it's still appropriate and a motion that needs to be discussed and efforts that need to be made relative to housing.

One of the important portions of this motion, Mr. Speaker, is the importance of having an adequate supply of affordable housing in Alberta. It has been quite readily identified in this city and in other major centres of the province and, in fact, in rural Alberta . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

Now time has moved on, and we must go on to Bills. Thank you.

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

4:30 Bill 208
An Act to Amend the Public Service
Employee Relations Act

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today on behalf of the leader of the Liberal Party, the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, to move second reading of Bill 208, An Act to Amend the Public Service Employee Relations Act.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking to this particular Bill, it's important to give a little bit of background as to the reason for this Bill. I think that reason is abundantly clear in the memories of all the members of the House. The Bill itself is a direct response to last year's illegal strike by the Alberta social workers. I think all members will recall the demonstrations that occurred and the anxiety, the anger that was seen directed against this House by not only the social workers but also by the clients whom they are destined to serve. The action that was taken by the social workers we believe was a direct result of the unfairness of the current Public Service Employee Relations Act which we now have. The Bill before us, Bill 208, is therefore an attempt to create a couple of things: first of all, an effective bargaining process by also allowing the civil servants the right to strike and also by creating a more effective arbitration process, which also was one of the problems.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

The current legislation doesn't allow public service workers the right to strike; at least, the vast majority of them. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of 90 percent are declared essential services. About 90 percent of the public service workers are declared essential and not allowed the right to strike. Unfortunately, that creates an unjust and unbalanced system at the bargaining table when it comes time to renew contracts between the employees and the employers, to sit down and start the

negotiating process. Unfortunately, the reality is that under the current legislation the government really holds the hammer. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we don't feel that that is appropriate or fair, and that is really the intent and the reason for introducing this Bill.

Now, the intent of Bill 208 is, as I said, to ensure that the collective bargaining process will be a fairer and more reasonable bargaining process for both sides of the parties involved and will, in fact, make some changes to an Act that has been in place since 1977. I think the reality, of course, Mr. Speaker, is that in today's day and age, 1991, we have to respect the fact that times have changed. I was not a member of the House in 1977 when the original Public Service Employee Relations Act was brought forward, and I suppose I would have been against it in its present form then as I am now. That's part of the reason for this proposed change.

When we look at what happened last year, Mr. Speaker, just going back in history a little bit to look at the cause of the social workers' strike we had last year, we have to look at, for example, caseloads. It was one of the major issues. It wasn't just salary. Of course, salary is always an important factor, but the caseloads, the work that those people have to deal with is important. It's important to note also that it wasn't just the number of cases but also the complexity of cases. It's far easier for a social worker to deal with a single individual than a family that may have a husband, a wife, and several children. The more complex the family, the more complex the situation. Even though it's still one caseload versus another caseload, they're substantially different situations. I think that's one of the things that has to be brought to mind, that it's not just the number but also the complexity of cases. Unfortunately, one of the sections in here, to which I'll refer momentarily, really doesn't deal with that at all.

Another problem, because of the nature of the caseloads and salaries and so forth, was a very high turnover rate. I think when you get a general dissatisfaction, you find in fact that there is quite a high turnover rate. In fact, certain regions in the province have had as much as an 85 percent turnover in their social workers within a 12-month period. Now, what clearer indication is there of just deep, intense dissatisfaction with the current labour law the way we have it, the current Public Service Employee Relations Act?

Wage parity. Obviously, these people have to feed their own families. The social workers themselves have to take that paycheque home; they have to make ends meet. Yet, you know, they deal with the same kinds of clients sometimes. For example, the social workers who were out on strike last year under the Family and Social Services department have earnings as much as \$7,000 less than Solicitor General young offenders' workers, who work with the same kind of client, the same kind of person these social workers have to deal with. A \$7,000 difference is a fair chunk of money, Mr. Speaker. When you are doing the same job as someone else and getting \$7,000 less, you really have to question what kind of value the government is putting on your work. It's a major concern. For example, mental health workers with an MSW, a master of social work, could earn as much as \$7,000 less than the same person with a master of arts degree in psychology. A similar kind of education, a similar kind of client: a \$7,000 difference. That just doesn't make a lot of sense.

Now, the government's typical response, which we in the Liberal caucus do not accept, is that there is a binding arbitration process that makes it a fair and equitable process. That's the first section to which I would like to refer in Bill 208, Mr.

Speaker. It says that section 48(2) is repealed. When we look at the Public Service Employee Relations Act, 48(2) talks about an arbitration board: "and provisions in respect of the following matters shall not be contained in the arbitral award of an arbitration board", things like 48(2)(a), which says "the organization of work, the assignment of duties and the determination of the number of employees;" (b) refers to "the systems of job evaluation and the allocation of individual jobs" – in other words, caseloads, which is exactly what the social workers were concerned about; (c) talks about "selection, appointment, promotion, training" or even transfer from one department to another; and (d) refers to pensions. So under the current legislation all of those things are excluded from the binding arbitration process.

The government's argument is that binding arbitration is fair. How can it possibly be fair when all those things are excluded? It simply doesn't deal with the concerns that were at the heart of the social workers and that led them to their strike last year. Clearly, we need to make some changes. This particular section says that specific labour relations issues that are very important to different groups cannot be dealt with. So aside from being denied the right to strike under the current legislation, it also says, "Not only can you not strike, but we're not even going to consider some of these things." Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's absolutely unfair and should be abolished.

Now, one of the problems that came out last year is that the Minister of Labour, and I believe also the Premier, said there would be negotiations provided the social workers were prepared to go back to the negotiation table and even work toward binding arbitration, yet the heart of the issue was caseloads, how many and how complex. So on one hand the invitation is there to come back to the table to negotiate, to deal with these issues; but, sorry, under this section we can't deal with all these issues you're really concerned about, not just your pay but also your working conditions and what you have to deal with. That is really what we're getting at with eliminating section 48(2). It doesn't allow the social workers to provide the quality of care that is necessary.

Now, it's important to note that the social workers in this province have a social work code of ethics. Much as a doctor, for example, has a Hippocratic oath to which they're supposed to subscribe, the social workers have a level which they're supposed to attain, yet the caseloads that were supposed to be dealt with were so high, so complex, and so difficult that they couldn't achieve that. They were in a real catch-22 situation. They couldn't provide the level of service they had sworn to provide at the best of their ability because the caseloads were too high, yet the government says, "We're not going to negotiate caseloads with you." Well, Mr. Speaker, that's simply not appropriate. They were not allowed, because of the situation with caseloads, to really fulfill their mandate under the Social Development Act. Until that was on the table, the social workers, we knew, were not prepared to come back, and of course that's exactly what happened.

4:40

Part of the problem is the restrictive arbitration process. We've got to have something that puts all the issues on the table and allows all those things to occur. Had the issue of caseloads, I think, been on the table, and this is hindsight and perhaps speculation on my part, the social workers probably would have gone back to work, and there wouldn't have been the need for this government to take out a court injunction against their own

workers, which is really, I think, a travesty that should not occur again.

Mr. Speaker, that's the reason for the repealing, under Bill 208, of section 48(2).

Moving on to the next section – I want to just skip for a moment to number 4. Number 4 says, "Section 93 is repealed." Mr. Speaker, this really doesn't require a whole lot of comment, because section 93 under the current legislation simply says that no person or trade union shall strike; that's the short form of it. I think that really is simply inappropriate. There's no other way to describe it. The right to strike is one of the fundamental concepts of a decent labour negotiations procedure, and to simply say that that is not going to be allowed doesn't allow for that worker to use really what is their big club, if you want to call it that. It's actually one of the indispensable cornerstones of the right to a free and democratic society for those workers to simply withdraw their services if they choose, if they decide that the negotiations are not going properly, whether that service is, as in the case last year, with the social workers or the case of the prison guards that we also had occur last year. We ran into some real difficulties with a variety of public-sector servants who were just saying, "We can't take it anymore, and we're going to break the law." That showed the degree of concern, the degree to which they were upset with the process: that they were prepared to break the law despite the fact they knew that according to the legislation it was in fact an illegal act. They really felt they had no other course of action.

Now, if we think about the whole process of labour negotiations and the process of initiating a strike, many strikes I think are avoided because a strike vote is taken, and it really sends a clear message to the employer, whether that's the government or a private industry. The message that's being sent out by the union is: "We're serious. We are fed up. We have said everything we feel we can say, and if we don't get some real change, then we're going to take our services and we're going to remove our services from where we're normally working." Then what happens, typically, is that that clear message is sent to the employer – in this case it would be the government – that it's time to really sit down and negotiate the nitty-gritty details, what is really at the heart of what's going on. Unfortunately, in this situation that we have right now, Mr. Speaker, the strike vote also is illegal, because to take a strike vote for an illegal strike also has to be illegal. Therefore, all it tends to do is make things more complex, it makes the issue hotter, and it makes people more upset with the entire process.

Clearly, section 93 must be removed simply to allow those workers the full benefit of the total bargaining process, the total bargaining tool.

Moving on, then, Mr. Speaker, there has to be some fairness on the other side too. To that extent we have also suggested that section 94 be repealed, and this is number 6 under here. Section 94 deals with lockouts. It says, "no person shall cause or attempt to cause a lockout by an employer," and, "no employer shall lockout or consent to a lockout." In fairness, that too is part of the bargaining process: if on one hand the employees have the right to strike, on the other hand the employer must have the right to a lockout. That, too, is part of the bargaining process. So in fairness to both sides, to simply eliminate the right to strike or to simply allow the employees the right to strike without allowing the employer also the right to have a lockout in a fair and open and equitable process . . . There have to be both sides to the coin. So that is the simple rationale behind the repealing of section 94.

Just backing up, Mr. Speaker, section 92.2 deals with the suspension of dues. This section is quite long and involves quite a bit of detail. Basically, what it's looking at here is that if section 93, which deals with the right to strike, is in fact removed and allows those employees the right to strike, then really there is no reason for having section 92.2. Therefore, it really just sort of flows hand in hand with removing that restriction of the employees to strike, and that is the purpose behind that. It simply is redundant and is no longer necessary.

Section 93.1 talks about fines, Mr. Speaker, and that is referred to as amendment 5 in Bill 208. Obviously, if the employees have the right to strike and can hold a legal strike following accepted bargaining procedures and so on, then of course there's no concern for any kind of penalties as described in section 93.1 and the three subsections there, if they're on a legal strike. Obviously, in an open bargaining process there's no need for any fines to occur.

The right-to-strike legislation, Mr. Speaker – just as I come to the end here – is in existence in other provinces, just for members' information, in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and also the federal public service. So we're not dealing with really groundbreaking legislation here. I think the amendments that I am proposing here on behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Glengarry really serve to, first of all, address the needs of our public servants that we have here in this province and the need they have to have an equitable and fair chance to bargain, whichever local comes up for a renewal, and it brings this province in line with what some other provinces have done as well. So clearly it's not an inappropriate thing. Those other jurisdictions that I mentioned have found that when you have a fair bargaining process, in fact it allows for more openness and camaraderie and the spirit of working together rather than the kind of hostility we saw last year. I think it's important, by these changes that are proposed here – the ability to hold strikes and lockouts are simply necessary counterparts to an open and free collective bargaining process.

Just as a closing comment, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to remember that the only way to really have a stable and strike-free public service is not to take away their right to strike but simply to take away the need to strike. Allowing an open process would take away that need and would serve the better interests of all Albertans.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to participate in this debate on Bill 208, An Act to Amend the Public Service Employee Relations Act. I only wish there might be more interest on the government side. We can see that the Minister of Labour and almost the whole cabinet couldn't even be bothered to join us here this afternoon for this important debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame. Shame.

MR. GIBEAULT: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, there's very little interest, it seems, on the government side in the concerns of the employees of the province, the people who provide such essential and important services to people all over this province. Despite that lack of interest, we'll try and get some of the points that are relevant here on the record and hope that some of the

members of the cabinet and the caucus on the government side will read *Hansard*.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, certainly section 4 of Bill 208, repealing section 93 of the Public Service Employee Relations Act – that is, the clause that prohibits strike – is absolutely essential. It seems that this government is dedicated to having an unfair, arbitrary legal environment in terms of dealing with its provincial employees rather than negotiating properly with them just like other workers in the province who operate under the labour relations legislation. This government has tolerated and provoked, I would suggest, strikes by nurses, social workers, correctional officers, and so on. Despite all the evidence that this legislation, the Public Service Employee Relations Act, does not work, this government has shown no inclination to change it.

So I'm glad to see that today we're looking at having some discussion about that, and as I said, I just hope we can get some inkling of interest, because this is a concern that many of the provincial employees feel very strongly about. The workers who work for the province should have the same right as every other worker, Mr. Speaker. There's no reason why we have this kind of legislation, the Public Service Employee Relations Act of Alberta, that denies these fundamental rights to the workers in the province in a very arbitrary, and let's call it, for what it's worth, dictatorial kind of law. I mean, there are laws in other provinces and certainly other countries that are much better than this shameless piece of legislation that we have here in Alberta.

Now, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, one of the shortcomings of Bill 208, among perhaps others, is the fact that there is no reference or no attempt to correct section 21(1) of the Public Service Employee Relations Act. If members are not familiar with that, I would like to just point out that that is the section of the Public Service Employee Relations Act that specifies bargaining units and who's in and who's not in.

For example, one of the things that I and my caucus colleagues have always found very offensive is the reference in there to the fact that employees of the Legislative Assembly Office itself cannot be involved in bargaining units. The particular reference is that any employee of the Legislative Assembly Office "shall not be included in a bargaining unit or any other unit for collective bargaining." Why do we have to have such a provision there? Why can we not respect the employees' rights to form a bargaining unit, join a union or an employee association if they so wish? I mean, what is the uniqueness or the special purpose of the Legislative Assembly Office, which includes all of our caucus employees, the library, all kinds of people who should be able to have the same rights as other workers in the province, and that is the right to strike so that they can negotiate for their particular collective agreements just like other workers in the province? That is one of the most offensive provisions that we see in there, because we're saying that for the Legislative Assembly there should be one rule, and then for everybody else there should be another rule.

Mr. Speaker, that is a serious shortcoming in Bill 208, and I regret that, but certainly the provision for providing the repeal of section 93, the no-strike clause, is a step in the right direction, because it has caused so much grief, so much hardship. It's a foolish law because it's the kind of law that says – well, it would be like having a law against gravity. I mean, it's such a foolish kind of unnatural law. You put in place laws that are unenforceable and unworkable and that do not have the support of the community, and then you get situations where we have illegal

strikes and so on because the law is simply unworkable and unmanageable. People do not take kindly to having their fundamental rights, in a society such as ours that likes to call itself democratic, taken away in such an arbitrary manner here, stacking the deck in such an unfair way.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will rest those comments for the moment and look forward to somebody on the government side responding to this Bill.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Innisfail.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments on Bill 208. Basically, it repeals sections of the labour Act. Before I get into what sections it deleted, I'd just like to make a few comments saying that it hasn't been working. Since the labour Act was passed in 1980, we've had two illegal strikes: one the social workers last year and one the nurses before that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment, too, briefly on section 95, which outlines penalties for persons who contravene section 94(1). It's repealed by Bill 208. This seems an oversight by the hon. member, as there is no need to include a penalty for an offence that is deleted from the proposed Bill. It's a rather minor oversight but characteristic of the haphazard and reckless manner in which this Bill was developed.

I'd just like to make one more comment a little bit and then close my discussion. The Bill allows for indefinite suspension of essential services, but it ignores the successful process of arbitration and mediation that now exists.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to adjourn debate.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Having heard the motion to adjourn debate, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

PARLIAMENTARY COUNSEL: Bill 209, Mr. Mitchell.

MR. GIBEAULT: He's not here, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you would just allow us for a moment to consult with the Clerk.

All hon. members are by now aware that we have a slightly unusual circumstance. The debate having been adjourned on Bill 208 and the actual Bill 209 not being ready for this Assembly to debate, having not been printed, I would ask that Bill 210 be called.

MS M. LAING: It hasn't been printed either.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Bill 211? [interjection] Bill 210 I'm advised has been printed. [interjection] That's fine.

I would like to adjourn the Assembly for five minutes so that we can consult. We'll reconvene at 5:05. Perhaps the repre-

sentative party House leaders might come to the Table. We are adjourned until 5:05.

[The Assembly adjourned from 5 p.m. to 5:05 p.m.]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. members; 5:05 has arrived.

Point of Order Referring to the Absence of a Member

MR. WEISS: A point of order later, if I may, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay; point of order at this moment.

MR. WEISS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg the indulgence of the Assembly, but just a few minutes ago in the Assembly when the debate was in discussion with regards to second reading of Bill 208, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods raised what I believe is a serious error in regards to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, page 141, section 481(c). In his remarks he referred to the Minister of Labour. He uttered words such as absence of cabinet ministers. Subsection (c) does refer to the presence or absence of specific members and says, "A Member, while speaking [out], must not . . . refer to the presence or absence of specific Members."

I also might add that if one took note at the relevant time, when the hon. member made his remarks, there was less than 30 percent of his side, the nongovernment, and there were only two Liberal members present of the eight. As well, the member who sponsored the Bill was not present. At the same time, there were 25 or more members of the government, which is four times the total of members of both opposition sides.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for your ruling, because I certainly do not appreciate the reference to the presence or absence of any specific member. We all have duties and responsibilities, and I respect when their Leader of the Opposition is having to be out on matters very important to his side of the House.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, I wish to withdraw the references to the absences. I recognize that was unparliamentary, and I apologize for that.

Point of Order Cries of "Shame"

MR. GIBEAULT: I've got another point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Point of order.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, during the debate that the Minister of Career Development and Employment just referred to, and I'm referring now to *Beauchesne* 489 regarding unparliamentary terms, the minister himself and several members on the government side used a word that you yourself have ruled to be unparliamentary, and that's the word "shame." I would ask him to withdraw that.

MR. WEISS: Mr. Speaker, if that's recorded in *Hansard* as having heard my remarks, my specifically voicing that - I'm not aware if it was recorded - I certainly would withdraw and apologize.

MR. SPEAKER: Certainly. Thank you, hon. minister, and thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing

it forward. It's an interesting version of pot and kettle. Perhaps in future I can rest easy that you yourself won't bring it forward again.

Point of Order

Precedence of Business

MR. SPEAKER: Red Deer-North. I assume another point of order.

MR. DAY: Yes, a point of order, Mr. Speaker, citing Standing Order 9(1) in terms of precedence of business. Something rather out of the ordinary having taken place today in terms of items that are to be on the Order Paper and items that are to be ready, the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry – and I realize the sensitivity here; I have to be careful – not being present to present his own Bill, and then the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark not even having his Bill prepared, has resulted in somewhat of a disruption in the precedence of order of business of the House. I know the government members have some of their Bills ready and have had their Bills ready far in advance of any preparation done or not done by members of the Liberal Party, and were ready.

I just want to bring that forward as a point of order: that the order of the Assembly has been quite disrupted today because of total lack of preparation. Your own good graces have allowed for these Bills to be on the Order Paper for weeks, and now we as members are robbed of an opportunity to debate these Bills because of a shameful – excuse me, I take back that term – an irresponsible lack of preparation on the part of the Liberal members.

MR. SPEAKER: On this particular point of order, Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In talking of members speaking to Bills, as the minister for career development has pointed out, it's difficult for members to always be in the House.

Speaking of unpreparedness, I was more than happy to present the Bill that was addressed this afternoon, to which unfortunately the government caucus, with 59 members in the House, found the ability to have only one member prepared to speak to that Bill. Typically, we only get one hour per week for private member's Bills, and it's unfortunate that the government caucus did not deem that Bill sufficiently important to speak to.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with respect to having a Bill prepared, the Bill under discussion, Mr. Mitchell's Bill 209, was submitted for printing some six weeks prior to today's date, which should be sufficient time. Quite honestly I do not understand what the difficulty is in preparing that particular Bill. The preparation has been done, the Bill has been sent in, and it has been prepared for printing. What I suspect we have here, by the government caucus raising a number of points of order, is simply an attempt to delay until past 5:10 when Mr. Paszkowski from Smoky River will then get the opportunity to present his

Bill both today and on another day, which is absolutely ridiculous.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: On this point of order?

MS BARRETT: Yes, please. Mr. Speaker, I understand the difficulty that has been caused today by not only one but several Bills not being printed, regardless of when they were submitted for printing. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore submitted hers some time ago, as we all did. There has been quite a problem in getting the Bills into printing, and we all know that.

I would just like to say that if the points of order being raised were an attempt to bring us past 10 past 5 so that the next Bill, the one being sponsored by Mr. Paszkowski, would come forward and then come back the following Thursday, I would consider that a dishonourable thing for the Acting Government House Leader to conduct.

Thank you.

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, since this point of order has extended considerably, I would just assure the House leader of the New Democrat Party that it would be our intention, given the unusual circumstances, to give members a few extra minutes and to move adjournment once you've ruled on this point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the Chair has information here – it's 208 not 209. Is it 209? How come I have 208 here? – that it was drafted six weeks ago, and some members in that particular caucus have still been working on it. I'll double-check what's been transpiring in that regard. Certainly six weeks seems time enough to have things be prepared in all caucuses, especially the one that's sponsoring the Bill.

Nevertheless, we have here a complaint rather than a point of order. It's been a very unusual circumstance. As has been the practice of the House, the Chair has to assume that the member sponsoring the Bill was unavoidably absent, whatever the reason, and therefore allowed Calgary-North West to be able to go ahead and put forward the Bill.

No matter what the clock says we're now . . . That's no point of order but an interesting discussion.

Minister.

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, in light of the very interesting afternoon, I think members will have an extra few minutes. I would intend to move that we call it 5:30, after indicating to the House that the House will resolve itself into Committee of Supply as scheduled at 8 o'clock.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:14 p.m.]