

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, June 4, 1991**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 91/06/04

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file with the Legislative Assembly a petition signed by some 12,858 individuals protesting the cutbacks in benefits for seniors and urging the withdrawal of these cutbacks.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present the following petition that has been received for a private Bill. It's the petition of Mel Svendsen for the Jennifer Leanne Eichmann Adoption Act.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I request that the petition from the Calgary high school students tabled yesterday be read.

CLERK:

The undersigned request the Legislative Assembly pass an Environmental Rights Act, guaranteeing all Albertans the right to a healthy environment and the means to enforce it, as presented in Bill 201, of 1990.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, because of the special circumstances of the private Bill for which a petition was presented today, I would ask that the petition be deemed to have been read and received.

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of that action, please say yes.

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

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

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, following question period and pursuant to Standing Order 40, I intend to ask the unanimous consent of the Assembly to pass a motion that the Legislative Assembly do formally recognize the week of June 3, 1991, as Seniors' Week in Alberta and have the Legislature further recognize the unfailing contribution made by Alberta seniors in every facet of our society.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. MAIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file a copy of a letter from Avie Bennett, the president and chairman of McClelland &

Stewart publishing, to Premier Don Getty that confirms the retention of Edmonton operational headquarters for *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and *The Junior Encyclopedia*.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. ANDERSON: It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Alexis Aitken and Bogna Skupinska, who are here with 10 students from le lycée Louis Pasteur school in my constituency. I might say that this is the third year they have attended, and I congratulate the school on doing that. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to defer the rest of this introduction to the grandmother of one of the students in attendance, the hon. Minister of Labour.

MS McCOY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member. I would very much like on this special occasion to welcome my granddaughter, Amanda Patterson, to the House. She is a student of le lycée Louis Pasteur. Amanda and her classmates are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Grande Prairie.

DR. ELLIOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Peace River, the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, to introduce a school from High Level, the High Level public school, who are visiting today from the minister's constituency. There are 57 students and 12 adults in the group, and the group leader is Tanya Woodger. Fifty members are in the members' gallery, and 19 are in the public gallery. I'd ask the Assembly to give this minister's guests a special warm welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway, followed by the Minister of Health.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a constituent of mine, one John Grauer, who single-handedly collected over 1,500 signatures on the seniors' petition. I would like him to stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to introduce 24 students from the Laurier Heights school in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They are accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Woodrow, and I'd ask them to rise and be recognized and welcomed by this Assembly.

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a public school trustee from the city of Red Deer, Mr. Sam Dymianiw. He also is a valuable member of the health care facilities review committee. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism.

MR. MAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a resident of Edmonton-Parkallen who has traveled all this distance to the Legislature today, Marian Morton. With her is her sister, who has traveled even further. Erla Mason is visiting

here from Los Angeles. I'd like the Assembly to give them both a warm welcome.

head:

Oral Question Period

Senior Citizens Programs

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my question to the Minister of Health. This government's attitude towards seniors is now well understood by the pensioners of this province. It doesn't want to consult with them, doesn't want to support them in a fair and decent way, and doesn't want to listen to them. Well, I want to say to this government that the seniors of Alberta will not stop until they are heard and until the cutbacks are reversed, and I just filed 12,858 names to prove it. I want to focus in on the little propaganda piece that was sent out by this government, *The Facts on Seniors' Programs*, a classic example of incomplete information, partial explanation, and spin-doctored claptrap. Specifically, it doesn't tell seniors how much of the so-called home care increase will actually go to them or instead to those under 65. It doesn't tell them that at least 20 percent more will come out of their pockets for extended health benefits, and it doesn't tell them that Aids to Daily Living cutbacks will mean no coverage for essential items such as canes. My question to the minister is simply this: will the minister tell seniors how she justifies this insulting attempt to hoodwink them instead of explaining exactly what her cutbacks will mean to them in their lives in a very concrete and direct way?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, there is a very direct communication going to all seniors on the Aids to Daily Living program to explain the program benefits to them. The small brochure that the hon. member is referring to is one that is a general description of the programs. The book follows, and the associate minister may well wish to supplement my remarks.

With respect to the Aids to Daily Living program, this is a program that isn't just of benefit to seniors but is of benefit to all Albertans who have extraordinary medical supply needs beyond those that are available through the institutional side. In other words, it supports community living.

2:40

One of the realities we faced, one of the discussions we had extensively in this Legislature was the fact that the former program, which the opposition would like to return to, did not contemplate the funding of power wheelchairs, updated technological benefits for diabetics, home ventilation therapy. We had a good deal of discussion in this House. We talked extensively about the consultation on the Aids to Daily Living program. We had the Premier's commission on the disabled go out and consult with Albertans. As a result we've made some structural changes to this program in this year which I believe will benefit all Albertans including seniors.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, the associate minister said the other day that they didn't consult. This minister says something different. If they were consulting, they wouldn't have this many names on petitions in this Legislature today.

The taxpayers paid for this, and I want to come back to it. Why didn't you tell the complete truth if you're going to hand out taxpayers' money? I'm asking specifically about home care. Some of the increases that they talk about aren't going to seniors; they're going to people under 65. Let me ask her specifically about that. Why didn't you tell the truth about that?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, as was outlined in the Budget Address and as I said on April 8 in this Assembly, there's a \$16 million increase for home care. That is documented in the budget. Ten million dollars of that is for increased support for seniors for home care; \$6 million of that is for the extension of home care to the under 65. If the Leader of the Opposition would like to argue against the latter, be my guest. In our view it's important. It was certainly one of the primary recommendations of the Premier's council on the status of the disabled that we extend our home care services to citizens under age 65. At the same time, we've enhanced the support for seniors. It is not a reduction as he is alleging.

MR. MARTIN: With that, she's already admitted that this is a misleading document, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Premier, who's supposed to be in charge. Alberta seniors are speaking up all over this province: as I said, 12,858 names and more coming. Seniors are angry and frustrated. They say the government is not listening, and they want this government to reverse these cuts. I say to the Premier: if they don't, they're going to pay a huge political price. Let's get right to the matter and get this government to tell seniors exactly what its position is now. Will the Premier tell seniors right now whether these cutbacks will be reversed or not?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thought the hon. Minister of Health straightened out the Leader of the Official Opposition and finally brought him up to date about what's actually happening. One of the biggest problems that's going on in Alberta right now is the distortion that's being carried out by the leader of the ND Party, a disgraceful distortion of information, and he's been supported in the same distortion by the Liberal Party. It makes the information tougher to get out, but I must say that we are responding to seniors' concerns. We're making sure that the information is out to them. We're making the point, and they understand it, that there is not a province in this country that has anywhere near the programs that Alberta has for seniors.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, it's this government that's distorted.

Corporate Income Tax

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go to the Provincial Treasurer and move from who this government expects to pay more, like the seniors of the province, to who it thinks shouldn't have to pay at all. We have documentation recently about how unfair the taxation system is federally, but it's worse in this province. Going through tax information, we find that in the last three years just 20 Alberta-based corporations declaring total pretax profits of \$1.25 billion paid virtually no tax whatsoever. In fact, seven companies paid less than 2.5 percent, and the rest didn't have to pay a red cent. This is not even an exhaustive list. To the Treasurer: given that each and every one of these companies made at least \$3.5 million in profits, how does the Provincial Treasurer justify letting them off the hook while his budget slashes funding for such things as canes, eyeglasses, and medicines for the seniors of this province?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I've heard confusing positions before, but that has to be one of the better ones. I might say that if it were in Ontario, then it would be a red cent. However,

here in Alberta what we do have is one of the most equitable overall tax positions of any government in Canada. On the corporate side let me remind members that just yesterday I introduced a new corporate tax legislation amendment which increases the large corporation tax by half a percent and remind Albertans that we are very fortunate in this province that we have one of the most comprehensive, fair tax regimes of any province in Canada. It attracts a significant amount of investment, and unlike other provinces we are here to encourage that kind of investment, because it is the investment dollar that generates jobs and new economic activity.

Now, what I have to say, Mr. Speaker, with respect to those companies who don't pay tax is this. There is a reason for that; that is, of course, because they've had tax losses in previous years. Albertans know full well that we had to suffer through that period of 1986-87, when corporations lost a significant amount of money, and tax rules, not just here in Alberta but across Canada, provide that corporations can carry that tax loss forward and offset it against their income. Now we can see a very healthy growth in tax revenues, and in fact it will come close to \$900 million this current budget year, one of the largest increases in taxes by any government generated from the corporate side.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, the reason they don't pay taxes is that they're friends of Mulroney and they're friends of the Treasurer. Albertans know that this government and their buddy Brian Mulroney have hammered low- and middle-income earners with billions of dollars of tax increases while letting their huge corporate friends laugh all the way to the bank. That's the reality, no matter what he puts in there.

That's bad enough, but these companies that I'm talking about, the 20, not only did not pay any real taxes, but they actually received from the taxpayers \$12 million in tax credits, Mr. Speaker. Now, my question: does the Treasurer not think there's something terribly wrong with a taxation system that not only lets large companies get away with not paying any taxes but actually sees them receive money in the form of tax credits?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, the concept of corporate taxation, on large corporations in particular, is that the marginal tax rate is around 50 percent, a very high rate. At one point Alberta received 25 percent of the total corporate tax paid by corporate tax payers in Canada. That's a very large number for about 8 percent of the population. That means that we have a lot of corporate base here, and that corporate base invests back into our economy; for example, 2 and a half billion dollars in pipeline construction, the Al-Pac project. That's where that investment comes from.

I say again to the member that he should take just an introductory course in corporate taxation to find out that corporate losses are carried forward to be offset against taxable income and that in fact you can carry the corporate losses back. Now, that's essentially what happens. Those people who are familiar with the way in which we attract investment know that you have to have corporations generating that kind of economic activity. Otherwise, those people who cry jobs, jobs, jobs are crying in the dark. We're really sincere about generating jobs and economic growth. You've heard my colleague the minister of economic development talk about the successes and the economic growth . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Final.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I just have to learn more about business. I want to be able to hand out all the money to the corporations. We all have to learn more, just like this government. Loan guarantees, corporate welfare: we all have to learn more about it.

I want to just ask one thing I've asked the Treasurer about before, Mr. Speaker: a minimum corporate income tax. Even his buddies the Republicans in the United States saw the need for this. I'm suggesting that if we'd brought in a 20 percent tax, which is 1 percent below the Americans, this would have returned a quarter of a billion dollars to the Treasury. My question is simply this: will the Treasurer tell us whether he will stop this ludicrous, no matter how he justifies it, corporate welfare for large and profitable corporations by bringing in a corporate income tax, and if not, why not?

2:50

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, it strikes me that in looking at our record of fairness, it is clear that this government has been one of the fairest, most evenhanded in terms of balancing the costs of government among the participants. This recent legislation, the budget in particular, introduced increases in the corporate tax rates for large corporations, contrary to what happened in Ontario, where the ND Party there increased it for the small business sector. Talk about equity; that isn't equity at all.

Moreover, in this province we have not redistributed wealth in favour of large corporations or those who are in the higher incomes. In fact, we have made sure that our tax system protects those at the low income. That's why in the case of personal income taxes, specifically in the general tax arguments, we have allowed more than 500,000 Albertans to be removed from personal income tax or exempted from income tax. Mr. Speaker, we have complemented that with no sales tax in this province. We have gone out of our way to protect the middle-income earner and the low-income earner in this province. That's our mandate, and that's our commitment.

Constitutional Reform

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the hon. Premier. Before the special constitutional committee of this Assembly has reported, in fact even before the committee met, the hon. Premier was telling Albertans and Canadians that Alberta wanted a decentralized form of federalism. The Premier wanted a weak national government. In fact, in this very Assembly the Premier said that only details had to be worked out in terms of decentralization. Now, I understand that Mr. Clark comes to visit the Premier on Thursday to discuss the principles of national unity. My first question to the Premier is this: given that a number of Albertans, perhaps even a majority of Albertans, are saying that they want a strong national government and they want a national government that sets national standards for the environment, education, health care, social safety net programs, is the Premier prepared to back off on this position of decentralization?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal Party has made several comments leading into his question, some of which are quite false. I'm looking forward to seeing Mr. Clark at some time in the future. I have no meeting scheduled with him on Thursday.

As well, I want the hon. leader of the Liberal Party to know this: I am never prepared to back off and allow a federal government to again rape and pillage the province of Alberta

because they're dominated by central Canada and do it to win votes in Ontario and Quebec. No more disgraceful exhibition of politics was followed than by the leader of the Liberal Party when he never spoke up for Albertans when his own party was raping and pillaging this province and now finds some new way to try and say: let's give Ottawa greater control so they can hammer the provinces. Not while we're the government, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier was wrong, dead wrong, when he represented a position on Meech Lake pushing a Quebec-only agenda. He wasn't in tune with what Albertans wanted, and I fear that he's out of step on this issue as well. My question to the Premier is this. I'd like to know: considering decentralization, what exactly is the message you're going to give Mr. Clark when he does come calling and talks about principles of Canadian unity?

MR. GETTY: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I should just remind the hon. member that Meech Lake was passed unanimously in this Assembly. Now, I know that there's selective forgetfulness on the part of old Slippery Larry at times, but let's be clear that it was passed unanimously by this Assembly, it was passed by all three federal parties, and it was also supported by 10 Premiers. Now, it is true that we were unable after a passage of time to carry it through. It was perhaps because of lack of imagination, ingenuity, and communicating all of the potential that it might have brought to our country. Now we face greater threats to our country, and we're working towards making Canada unified and strong in the future.

Now, when Mr. Clark comes to meet with me, I hope we will have some initial discussions. I am going to advise Mr. Clark how strongly Albertans feel about having a united country, how strongly we believe that Canada has tremendous potential, but that potential can only be achieved if we are a united country. I will also be advising him that I will want him to meet with the chairman of our select committee to talk about constitutional details. I'm not talking about decentralization details; I'm talking about constitutional details, because this is a new package for Canada. I do not consider it a Quebec round. I consider it a new package for Canada. I would hope the hon. leader of the Liberal Party would broaden his mind in terms of trying to build Canada and not trying to play political games with this issue.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to debate issues in this Assembly any day, but I want it known on the record that when the Premier calls me slippery, I don't like that and I don't respect the Premier for that.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are going through an expensive process to determine what exactly the principles of Canadian unity are, what they want. Many of those Albertans are saying that they want a strong national government. Why doesn't the Premier open his ears and listen to those Albertans and take those comments and heed those comments and say those things to Mr. Clark when he comes calling? Why doesn't he do that?

MR. GETTY: I have to come back, Mr. Speaker. I know the leader of the Liberal Party supported the national energy program. I know the leader of the Liberal Party wanted in some way – and he follows the former leader of the Liberal Party – to have the federal government whip provinces into shape.

MR. TAYLOR: I didn't get any champagne to drink.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. GETTY: I guess I touched a sore spot with the hon. member there.

It's clear that Albertans do not want to be dominated from the centre. I know they do not want to have a federal government with a position that they can dictate a national energy program to the people of Alberta. We've had it in the past, and we are not going to agree to any form of new constitutional arrangement that will allow that to happen again in the future.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

MR. SPEAKER: Perhaps the hon. Premier would like to withdraw the previous adjective and find another one. [interjection] The adjective with regard to the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. I think it was "slippery."

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, it's been clear in my mind from watching the hon. member that he often appears slippery. Now, if you're saying that that's not parliamentary, then we're adding to the body of information in *Beauchesne*. I would take it back, but I'm sure the hon. member will have to stop acting that way.

Police Contract

MR. GESELL: The contract for RCMP services which was last negotiated in 1981 expired in March of this year. I ask the Solicitor General to advise this House about the progress of the federal/provincial policing negotiations.

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, there's been some press on this in the past week. I was made aware about 10 days ago by a personal call from Ottawa from the new Solicitor General, the hon. Mr. Lewis, that it was his intention to proceed to the federal cabinet to see if he could put a new look on the negotiations. He must have been immensely successful, because he has come back to all of the Solicitors General of Canada as well as the Ministers of Justice of the territories and indicated a willingness and request that we enter into a one-year extension of the 1981 agreement. My department proposes to recommend that to the government at its next cabinet meeting.

3:00

MR. GESELL: Mr. Speaker, many communities in Alberta and across Canada who rely on RCMP services have experienced considerable uncertainty since the agreement expired. Will the minister advise on the status of provincial/municipal contracts for policing services, particularly the cost-sharing arrangements?

MR. FOWLER: As well as the provincial contract, the 1981 agreement, which is going to be extended for a year, the same recommendation of the hon. Mr. Lewis applies to the municipal contracts, so the municipal contracts will also be extended for one year. The saving on this, Mr. Speaker, is 4 and a half million dollars for the municipalities in this current fiscal year and 11 and a half million dollars for the province in this fiscal year.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Strathcona.

National Safety Associates Ltd.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Safety Associates is an American company operating in Alberta that is

engaged in the business of the direct selling of water filters. NSA claims that their product inhibits bacterial growth, but recent studies in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary have shown that it actually creates an environment conducive to bacterial growth up to 2,000 times ordinary tap water and four times the federal safety standards. To the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs: given that consumers' groups are presently warning consumers about the problems with NSA filters and given that the company's claims about the performance of their product as a bacterial control device amount to false and misleading advertising, will the minister tell the Assembly what measures he is presently taking to protect Alberta consumers from NSA's products and practices?

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the particular company the hon. member is speaking of, the federal government is now engaged in an investigation of the company. My understanding is that a series of charges have been laid. We will assist in any way that we can to be of assistance to that government.

MR. CHIVERS: Charges are laid in Ontario, but the practices are in Alberta. NSA is no news to justice authorities on this continent. In Ontario there are 22 charges for false and misleading claims, and NSA has been charged in 12 different states in the U.S. To the Attorney General: given that NSA would appear to have almost certainly violated the laws that govern consumer sales practices not only in Canada but in Alberta, has the Attorney General initiated an investigation of the company for any violations under the federal Competition Act, and if not, why not?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, we don't do the investigations. If an item is referred by an interested party to an investigating agency, the agency does the investigation and sends the Attorney General the report. I will check that to find out if we've received a report. I'm not aware of one.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Nursing Home Care

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government's attack on seniors is widespread. If you're a senior trying to live independently at home, the government is making sure that seniors are burdened with heavy costs for services and supplies that make independent living possible. If you're a senior living in a nursing home, the government is going to make sure that you're not only going to pay more for accommodation but probably that the services and care provided will be less. My questions are to the Minister of Health. The announcement of 57 staff layoffs at Calgary's Carewest is yet another result of insufficient funding. Why is it that this government establishes minimum staffing guidelines that say 28 percent of staff must be licensed practical nurses yet only funds 4 percent?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, we've had major consultations with Albertans and long-term care institutions in this province since 1981 in respect of how we should appropriately fund nursing homes. We have made major adjustments in long-term care in the past decade, including building into nursing home care a major disincentive to institutionalize clients or patients who could be effectively accommodated in the community. The level of funding for nursing care balanced with the appropriate

level of resources is a 22 percent level for RNs and a 28 percent target level for LPNs, although that target has not been met in this year.

Within the context of Calgary in that overall Alberta context I think it's important to point out that of the 21 long-term care institutions in Calgary there will be a net increase of 1 and a half million dollars for Calgary nursing homes and additional funding of 110,000 nursing hours in that city as we start to equalize those who have had higher funding versus lower funding for the level of care provided in the past years.

MRS. HEWES: That's all well and good, but we're talking about people who are in a nursing home here and now, today. How on earth, Mr. Speaker, does the minister expect these long-term care facilities to follow these kinds of guidelines when the funding level is so low that they can't possibly meet the requirements? Just where does the minister think the extra money's going to come from?

MS BETKOWSKI: That begs the question of how the hon. member can stand and defend a nursing home that's providing a very high level of care with a very low level of nursing support. What is going on in the province is a matching of care with the resources, bringing up those who've had a very low level of care and bringing down some of those who've had a high level of care to the point of a net increase – I repeat – in the Calgary area for the 21 long-term care institutions in that city of 110,000 extra nursing hours and \$1.4 million in nursing care. I would remind the hon. member as well with respect to the rate increase being asked in our nursing homes for accommodation charges that we continue as a province to have the lowest nursing home rates and long-term care rates of any province in Canada.

MR. SPEAKER: Drayton-Valley.

Health Unit Boundaries

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Health. Because of the long distances required for some people in the MD of Brazeau to travel or to telephone to access the services of the Leduc-Strathcona health unit and because of their close proximity to West Central health unit, can the minister advise if a decision on any boundary change for the MD of Brazeau has been made at this time?

MS BETKOWSKI: We've virtually finalized the decision with respect to the people at the west end of the county of Leduc who are served, in their own view and through consultation with the many municipalities in their area, by the commerce centre of Drayton Valley rather than that of Leduc or Thorsby. While I haven't signed the order which would effect the change, certainly that's the way we intend to proceed.

MR. THURBER: Can the minister advise if there will be an appropriate transfer of funds along with any transfer of territory to carry out this service?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in the House previously in this session, there is no increase in the number of people being served in this transfer, and therefore it seems appropriate to proceed with a movement of some of those funds from the existing health unit over to the West Central health unit as a transfer of funding to go along with the people who are transferred by boundary adjustment.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

Provincial Debt

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans no longer believe a Premier that promises them a balanced budget while they see a Provincial Treasurer that delivers them an extra \$2 billion in debt, which is what this Provincial Treasurer did yesterday. Frankly, they've lost trust in the Premier's promises, and they've lost confidence in a government that seems unwilling or unable to tell them the truth about the province's finances. Now, the Provincial Treasurer said that he needs this \$2 billion increase in his debt ceiling to solve a short-term cash flow problem, but he's not asking for a temporary increase; he's asking for a permanent increase in that debt ceiling. To the Provincial Treasurer: will he admit that the real reason for his request for \$2 billion in extra debt is because resource revenues, Crown lease sales, and other revenues are not going to meet his projections and that he'll not be able to come in with a balanced budget this year?

3:10

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, when I addressed this issue yesterday in the Assembly and later when talking to the press, I made it very clear that the province through 1991 has some significant re-funding taking place. In fact, we have over \$2 billion taking place towards the end of this year. Sometime between the summer and December of 1991 we have to refinance \$2 billion worth of bonds of the province of Alberta. Now, I would like to have been able to stand here and say that we're going to repay those \$2 billion. Maybe in two or three years we will be able to say that, but today we have to refinance that \$2 billion.

How do you do that? Everybody here, everybody in Alberta knows that the province has now got a very good balanced budget, its fiscal plan is well in place, and the economy is just doing well, thank you, but we have to refinance that \$2 billion. Obviously, to refinance it you have to borrow before you can pay it back, so we have to borrow the money to retire the debt on that day. That's one of the reasons we need the flexibility to be able to borrow more money to buy down our debt, because at some point in time we may have to, in fact, increase the amount of outstanding debt right now.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta understand that like a family your cash flow comes in at different times through the year. Sometimes you get it depending on your sales efforts or your commission efforts, and sometimes your costs increase. I know at Christmas the costs of my family go up extensively. It's the same thing in government. We have intramonth problems. Sometimes the province of Alberta gets more money, and sometimes it has more expenditures, so on an inter-year basis, without increasing the overall debt of the province, we would have to, in fact, have more flexibility in terms of managing our debt position, and it's as simple as that. We have a balanced budget; we're sticking to the plan. He doesn't like to hear the good news, but it's here: a balanced budget. No other province could match it, Mr. Speaker, and it's happening for the people of Alberta because of the fiscal plan and the good efforts of this government.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, it's obvious, Mr. Speaker, that the snow we get in Alberta doesn't only come in December; it comes in June in the Alberta Legislature.

The biggest single refinancing of debt coming due this year, Mr. Speaker, is \$700 million later this month, but the Financial

Administration Act already gives the Provincial Treasurer authority to run up an overdraft of \$500 million. So just taking him at his word, he's got a short-term \$200 million problem when he's asking the Legislature for a \$2 billion solution. Given that the pattern and the track record of the Provincial Treasurer is that every year he asks for an increase in the debt ceiling and every year he runs up an equivalent deficit, will the Provincial Treasurer now confirm that his balanced budget speech is simply a discredited piece of political propaganda and that Alberta faces a \$2 billion deficit this year?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely wrong. The people of Alberta know it's a balanced budget, and that, in fact, is what's happening in the province of Alberta.

Just to get the perspective of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the ND Party, yesterday the Member for Calgary-Mountain View said that he found that it was unfortunate he had to be in Alberta. That's what he said, Mr. Speaker: it was unfortunate that he was here in Alberta. Well, that's clearly how that party across the way feels. They feel it's unfortunate that they're in Alberta. They'd rather be in Ontario, where in fact the debt is just soaring.

Let me read a little quotation here. It says that over the past while the debt of the province of Alberta has been well maintained, but in Ontario the debt in fact has increased so rapidly that three rating agencies have been forced to reduce the credit of that province of Ontario.

Decentralization

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, on several occasions I raised a question on the haphazard fashion in which this government is going about decentralization. When I last questioned the lottery marketing division being relocated to Stettler, the Premier lost his cool and accused the opposition of dumping on rural Alberta. At the same time, the Minister of Agriculture stated he intends to move some of his staff this August and the rest next August, yet his employees have not been informed of any specific plans. We're already into June, and time is running out. To the minister: can the minister inform us as to his latest decentralization plans, including the impact on employees?

MR. ISLEY: As I've stated before in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, as soon as the plans are finalized, the first people to know about it will be the staff of Alberta Agriculture.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I point out that time is running out. I would hope the government is aware of the Saskatchewan study pointing out the high cost of decentralization in that province.

My next question to the Premier: will the Premier put on hold any more plans for decentralization until both an overall master plan and cost analysis are tabled in this Assembly?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear to the hon. member that the government is determined to provide broad opportunities across this province and that we are going to work to maintain the strength and vitality of our smaller centres. We know the cities can take care of themselves. They grow and they grow, and they have strong industrial development and economic development initiatives. We are going to make sure the growth in this province is broadly distributed so there are opportunities all across Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

Alberta-Pacific Pulp Mill

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade. While the rest of the country is in recession, like the Provincial Treasurer says, Alberta's "economy is just doing well." This is due to good leadership, good planning, a good government, and good government MLAs. Even with the misleading statements by the Official Opposition here indicating that we are wasting taxpayers' dollars in creating projects like Alberta-Pacific, we are creating thousands of jobs for Albertans, not like the Ontario government: NDP government "scaring off jobs, investors." My question to the hon. minister is: will the minister give a status report on the Al-Pac project? The project has now been operating only 20 days, and I would like to see a report here to the Assembly.

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the some \$20 billion-odd worth of projects that we have listed in the paper we filed with the Legislative Assembly yesterday. We highlighted that this also is one of five major case studies that are going to contribute substantially to the further job creation within this province. I salute the hon. member who posed the question for his dedication in making sure that this project became a reality. Many other members in other parties suggested that it should not.

This company has already hired some 175 people. It's going to be creating thousands of jobs: some 2,250 person-years in the construction sector, some 550 person-years as it relates to infrastructure formation, some 365 jobs directly as it relates to the operation of the mill. I'm also encouraged that there is a local content as it relates to the hiring, whereby some 57 percent of those individuals have been hired locally. In addition to that, there is a strong native component, whereby they are employing individuals of our native population. It has been brought to my attention that to date there have been some \$400 million worth of contracts awarded with a high Alberta content. That construction activity is having direct spin-off benefits to this province, thanks to the participation of members.

3:20

MR. McINNIS: Now tell us about the pollution in the river. Why doesn't he tell us about the clear-cut logging?

MR. CARDINAL: I'll tell you about the native people that are dying up there, though, because they live in poverty. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Through the Chair.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the hon. Minister of Labour. Some of my constituents are concerned that some of the contracts are going to be union contracts, and they feel that they may not be able to access a job because they don't belong to the unions in that area. Could the minister give some assurance to my constituents today that local people in that region will access union jobs?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, the Northern Alberta Building and Construction Trades Council and Al-Pac have independently come to a letter of understanding, as I am informed. Both the building trades council and Al-Pac expressed great interest in having those people who live in the area employed in the

construction phase. They sat down together and have come to an agreement as to how both the unions and the company can encourage that kind of participation, both on defining what kind of construction work unions will be involved in and what kind of work many of the local businesses can be involved in, being non-union entirely. In addition to that, the unions have agreed to work very closely with those who are living in the area both to recruit them and to make sure they have opportunities. There's also a very heavy emphasis on the apprenticeship program to ensure that as many as possible, up to 100 percent, of the apprentices be in fact local residents.

Worksite Safety

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the minister of Occupational Health and Safety today. As Albertans ponder the proposed expansion of the Swan Hills waste treatment facility, it's important to recognize that the handling and treatment of toxic substances poses significant risks to the health and safety of Albertans, in particular the workers involved. The Official Opposition has learned that unsafe working conditions at this plant in Swan Hills have resulted in several workers having levels of PCBs in their blood in excess of 30 parts per billion, which is well above the Health and Welfare standard, and this has resulted in them being removed from their positions in the loading and unloading area of the plant. I'd like to ask the minister: what action has his department taken, if any, to ensure that the dangerous exposure of these workers to PCBs is restricted and workers do not have to continue to have this exposure?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the incident the member talks about. I met with Occupational Health and Safety just this morning. I have no information, but I'll check into that and make sure that I respond to the member.

MR. GIBEAULT: Well, the workers would appreciate a prompt reply.

Let me just ask the minister more in general in terms of a commitment to workers across the province who are affected by or who have worksites that have PCBs at the workplace. Will the minister give some commitment to have regular monitoring of those worksites so the workers can know their health and safety is not compromised by these most dangerous chemicals?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, within the Occupational Health and Safety legislation a worker should not, must not take part in any work that is dangerous. It's unfortunate that the hon. member has that information and he asks this in question period. Why hasn't he got it to me sooner so we could act on it? If it's in fact true, I'll get to know about it, but I haven't heard about that as of today. No matter where in Alberta, if there's a dangerous worksite, the worker should not participate. Just this morning I spent quite a few hours over at Gainers and talked to the workers there in respect to worksite safety, and the instruction from this minister and this government is that no worker should be involved in a jobsite that is dangerous.

MR. SPEAKER: Before we proceed to Standing Order 40, might we revert to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.
St. Paul, then Calgary-Forest Lawn.

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

MR. DROBOT: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 40 students from the Glen Avon school in St. Paul. They are accompanied by teacher Dave Doonanco and parent Rick Parrott. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Forest Lawn.

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of those rare and delightful occasions in which we have special guests from Calgary-Forest Lawn. It's my pleasure to introduce to you, sir, and through you to members of the Assembly 90 students from Calgary's Ernest Morrow junior high school. They're accompanied today by their teachers Mr. Calvin Davies, Mrs. Sharon Inkster, Mr. Lee Fletcher, Mrs. Marg MacCallum, Mr. Barry Sharpe, and Mr. Jack Mortson. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I require unanimous consent to formally recognize the week of June 3, 1991, as Seniors' Week in Alberta and more particularly to recognize the unfailing contribution made by Alberta seniors in every facet of our society.

It has been customary for the Alberta government, through the minister responsible, usually on the second Tuesday of the week that is designated by the government as Seniors' Week, to stand in this Assembly and have a ministerial statement given with respect to seniors in Alberta. That hasn't happened. It is either an oversight or perhaps it is embarrassment on the government's part because of what has happened by this government taking away benefits from seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I think the matter is serious. This has come to the attention of seniors. I think it can be interpreted as a slap in the face to the seniors of Alberta. I think this needs to be made good. I'm asking that the unanimous support of this Assembly be given to debate this motion.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Standing Order 40 request. Those in favour of the motion to proceed, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.
Edmonton-Glengarry, speaking to the motion.

Senior Citizens' Week

Moved by Mr. Decore:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly formally recognize that the week of June 3, 1991, is Seniors' Week in Alberta and further recognize the unfailing contribution made by Alberta seniors in every facet of our society.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, in 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, and 1990 the minister responsible for seniors has stood in this House, usually the second day of the week designated as Seniors' Week, and indicated that it would be appropriate to acknowledge the great work Alberta seniors had done, had contributed to the

province of Alberta. There are some 220,500 seniors in the province of Alberta. Nine percent of our population is now made up of people over 65 years of age.

I acknowledge the fact that the minister responsible for seniors had a proclamation by way of a press conference, as I understand it, but I don't understand why the minister responsible didn't stand in this Assembly, as ministers previously have stood and acknowledged and paid tribute to the seniors of Alberta. On a day like this, because of the tremendous work that Alberta seniors have done in laying the foundations for our province in terms of education and health care and a social safety network program and building our economy, all of those things need to be acknowledged, and we need to say thank you to those seniors. I think it must be a matter of public record, so people can pick up *Hansard* or they can listen to the radio or watch television and say: "Somebody there cares about us. Somebody there is prepared to recognize the value of our contribution to Alberta. Somebody there is prepared to consider looking after us and making sure that we have dignity in our sunset years." That hasn't happened, and I think the people of Alberta are owed an explanation.

Now, I think the reason is that the minister is under pressure. He is so shell-shocked from this whole matter, as is the government from taking away benefits from seniors, that they're afraid to stand up in this Assembly and deal with this issue. Seniors have put their hands to petitions. The Leader of the Opposition submitted a number of names by way of petition today to say that seniors are unhappy with the way things are going, the way this government is treating them. They're not being treated in the dignified way that they should be treated. Yesterday the Liberal Party submitted a petition with 3,500 signatures, saying that Alberta seniors aren't happy with the way things are going. Mr. Speaker, I want the opportunity for every member of this Assembly to stand up and acknowledge the great worth, the great value, the great contribution that seniors have given and to look them in the eye and say, "We're sorry we took away the benefits from you, and we'll talk to you and renegotiate and re-establish these benefits."

Thank you.

3:30

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few things about Seniors' Week. First off, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta were the people that established Senior Citizens' Week some few years ago. Part of our mandate is to support Seniors' Week and to advertise it, which we did starting in early January. The reason that some of us weren't in the House recently was because we were out joining with seniors in celebrating Seniors' Week. It is an upbeat celebration for seniors. It's not something to be degrading and critical. It's a celebration on behalf of seniors that's supposed to be upbeat.

Mr. Speaker, as far as the concerns about seniors are concerned, a lot of the things that were promoted to be cuts in seniors' programs were not cuts in seniors' programs, and I have to criticize those people that followed that through, because it created a lot of anxiety and really was a hardship to the seniors. When they found out what the actual cuts to seniors' programs were, they were relieved. I meet with seniors' groups all over Alberta. As a matter of fact, I was at two yesterday and one today, and there is no really tough criticism on what is happening. What they're saying is, "The things that we heard were cuts – we're relieved to find out they are not cuts." I've heard that from seniors' groups in quite a few places in Alberta that I've been to just recently.

Seniors' Week is very important. I particularly will be attending at least one function and maybe two every day this week. I believe that it's a great thing to celebrate seniors and recognize the contribution they made to the province. Certainly, we want to keep it an upbeat situation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, the member misses the point. Obviously everybody would like to be upbeat; everybody would like to be happy. You know: be happy. A lot of seniors aren't happy, but that's not the point of the motion. The point of the motion is that traditionally we bring a ministerial announcement. On the same day, yesterday, the Minister of the Environment brought through Environment Week. All the motion says is that we recognize it here in the Assembly.

Now, maybe the government doesn't like the criticism they get over on this side, but that's beside the point. They're paid to take the criticism from this side of the House whether they like it or not. To the hon. member: not everybody's upbeat and happy all the time. That's part of democracy. We say what we believe in. Those people know full well what was in the budget. I think the government's misleading themselves. If they want to take this condescending attitude and say that somehow the opposition has misled all these seniors, that they can't read; they don't know what's in the budget; they don't know what the cutbacks are all about – that's absolute and total nonsense. They do. I mean, the people that I was saying I was just dealing with in Lethbridge made it clear, and when they got the pamphlet, I'm telling you, they were madder when they read it. They were absolutely madder because they wondered what the waste of this money was about. They understood what was in the budget on that. At least be honest about that. The minister has been at least somewhat honest, at least from what I saw yesterday. He said that they didn't consult.

If we can take the attitude that we all want to be upbeat and happy and seniors want to feel that way too and there's a certain amount of celebration – I agree with the member, and I congratulate him for going out to these functions – that's part of it. But part of it is the work we do here in the Legislature. We're debating a very important part of the budget, the \$22 million in cuts. There should have been a ministerial announcement; we can both have our say in the Legislature. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's what democracy's all about. It's not just cutting ribbons and feeling upbeat and walking around getting congratulated all the time. It's accepting responsibility for our actions, whether you believe it or not.

I want to say to the government that people do not want these cutbacks. It's been loud and clear. People do understand what's in it. They don't need these pamphlets to know what's in the budget, and that's making them angry. They think that's a condescending attitude, that somehow they're being misled, that they're just kids that don't understand things. They do understand things. This issue is not going to go away from the government, Mr. Speaker. It's not going to go away. It's going to be out there, and it's going to be there whether they change their minds or not. I say that perhaps in a year or two or when we go to the polls, they'll find out about it.

The point is that it should have been brought here as a ministerial announcement, as the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry said, so that we can at least make our comments and put them on the record here in *Hansard*. That's the point, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the motion, actually. Seniors' Week was proclaimed. We kicked it off, as a matter of fact, in Calgary, where we had 10 or 12 various constituencies represented by the seniors. I'm not going to read all the proclamation – it was in the paper – but what I would like to do is just read the last paragraph:

In Alberta, [Seniors' Week is declared,] and I call upon all Albertans to join in the celebration of Seniors' Week and to recognize the valuable contribution of seniors.

I'd like to file four copies with the House, Mr. Speaker.

I believe this is the seventh consecutive year that we have celebrated Seniors' Week in this province, Mr. Speaker, a week of recognition that was initiated by the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, as already has been mentioned. It's a wonderful chance for all of us to celebrate the important contributions that seniors make to our province. It's appropriate this year that the theme of the week is Seniors: A Strength of Alberta.

Seniors play a vital role in all aspects of our community. A greater percentage of seniors are able to remain active as businesspeople, entertainers, writers, teachers, volunteers, and dozens of other involvements. There is a fascinating variety of seniors' groups across this province, Mr. Speaker, and they do everything from rebuilding airplanes to tap dancing and business consulting. Seniors today are more fit than ever before, and you'll find them involved in almost every activity imaginable. For children seniors are a source of good example and sound values. For middle-aged parents seniors are a source of comfort, strength, and stability. For all generations seniors provide important leadership and experience.

Given all these contributions and more, Mr. Speaker, seniors are clearly a vital resource, and they are constantly challenging the myths of aging. In fact, surveys show that most seniors report good health, and we are all living longer and healthier. Incomes and education levels of seniors are increasing. These are all positive trends that should encourage people to view the senior years as exceptionally rewarding.

This week, therefore, is an opportunity for all of us to pay tribute to seniors. There is a variety of activities planned to celebrate this week, everything from fitness walks to golf tournaments to teas. I urge all members of the Legislature and indeed all Albertans to attend as many as possible. On behalf of our Premier, the government of Alberta, and indeed all Albertans, I salute seniors across this province and look forward to their continuing involvement in this wonderful province of ours.

3:40

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was with some amazement yesterday that I watched the Minister of the Environment get up and proclaim Environment Week and recognize it. I anticipated the possibility of another minister following and reading a ministerial statement recognizing the work of seniors, the pioneers of this province. Obviously, after the motion is put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, a ministerial statement or what could take the place of a ministerial statement is rushed over to the minister. Unfortunately, it was not there yesterday. Unfortunately, it only came about because it was raised by a member of the opposition.

I look at the Order Paper and the first Bill, Bill 1, Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act, and I wonder about the sincerity of the government when we present Bill 1 and at the same time you see the same government fail to recognize the

week for them. We recognize what they have done as pioneers to this particular province. At the same time, we see what's happened when seniors across our province have cried out, screamed out, asking, "Why is the government doing what they're doing to us?" At the same time, we see a government so out of touch that they don't understand that it's happening. Despite the fact that petitions are presented in this House with thousands and thousands of names, a government member gets up and says that it's happiness out there, that they're not dissatisfied. What does gray power have to do to get the message across to this government that they are ashamed of what's happening? I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the reason why the minister did not get up yesterday and recognize Seniors' Week is because there's an embarrassment over there, and there should be an embarrassment. There are some members on the other side, I suspect, who do not agree with the cutbacks that have occurred, and if they had the opportunity, they would see it differently. Unfortunately, there are some who are very opinionated, who are very afraid to admit that they've done wrong, are afraid to go to the seniors, consult, get some participation, and back up to square one and say, "Let's do things right."

At this particular point, all the seniors are asking for, all they are saying, the thousands and thousands who have put their names on petitions, is: "Consult with us. Sit down and consult with us." I would suggest to the ministers that they should look at the city of Edmonton a number of years ago when there was a user fee imposed on transit fares. The way that was approached was by consultation with the seniors, sitting down with them and saying, "What's acceptable; what do you feel is the answer?" and the seniors coming back and saying, "Look, this is what we wouldn't object to: we want to pay a little bit here because we feel that's fair; however, we shouldn't have to pay here." That's the way it's done. I am very, very embarrassed for that government on that side to have failed to recognize the pioneers, the seniors of this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't resist rising to put a few comments on the record in support of this Motion 40. I guess we all remember that our parents and our grandparents built a society here in Alberta out of wilderness.

Of course, we're all proud of that, and I think we should take this week to salute our seniors.

Edmonton-Kingsway has probably more than its fair share of seniors' lodges. That's an asset, I think, because I find that the seniors in my riding are very responsive and very respectable citizens that help to give a sense of continuity and history to this city. There are seven lodges in my riding: Meadowcroft, St. Andrew's, Central Village, Central Manor, Mountwood, Sunset Lodge, Alliance Villa. There are about 1,000 seniors in those lodges, plus there must be another couple of thousand living in their own homes in the riding. I want to say to those seniors that we're very proud of the work you've done over the years. Most of them, either their parents or they themselves, have seen the first war, a depression, a pioneer period of building a society here in Alberta, and a second war, so most of them have earned their gray hairs. It's only fitting that this House should recognize the contribution that seniors have made to our society.

The government has failed to be as up front with its seniors as it should have been, by not consulting them on the changes they made, so yesterday I held another seniors' meeting in my

riding. I had just gone through a series of seniors' meetings in the March/April period.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Half a moment, please.

I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry would be good enough to supply a copy of the motion to the Table and the Chair so we might know what we are indeed debating, please.

Thank you. Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Okay; thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday I held a special meeting. Between 80 and 100 seniors came out, and they were not particularly happy with the government. Now, I won't go into a lot of details, but we had a very good meeting, and I think what it exemplified is that yes, seniors are prepared to celebrate being seniors in this week of honouring seniors, but they also are going to celebrate it by standing up for their rights; for instance, like the senior that I introduced earlier, Mr. John Grauer – who, by the way, is still up in the gallery – who has gone out and collected about 1,500 signatures for the petition that we presented in the Assembly this afternoon. That is the way Seniors' Week is going to be celebrated. There aren't that many seniors that are millionaires, that don't mind the cutbacks. The majority of them know and understand that a lot of their fellow seniors are in economic difficulties because of some of these cutbacks, and they do not appreciate it.

So the message to the government is that we have to take care of our seniors. They deserve it, and that's what we on this side of the House believe should be done. This week will be a muted celebration of being seniors, but it will be a week where seniors stand up and are counted because they believe they have rights and they're going to insist on them.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Before the Chair recognizes Edmonton-Gold Bar, this is the motion as moved by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. Moved that:

the Legislative Assembly . . . formally recognize . . . the week of June 3, 1991, [to be] Seniors' Week in Alberta and to further recognize the unfailing contribution made by Alberta seniors in every facet of our society.
Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for reading it. I'll try to keep within the context and the intent of the motion.

Mr. Speaker, tradition and timing are everything. Here in this House we have a tradition of ministerial statements on significant occasions and significant events. This motion is directed to just that purpose, because yesterday when anticipated, such a statement did not occur, and it was missed. It was noticed. Timing, of course, to a politician is the essence. Timing is what we're all concerned about all of the time, so I suggest that there are some very good reasons why the tradition was missed yesterday. The tradition was not carried on because the timing was not correct.

Mr. Speaker, the objectives of Seniors' Week in our proclamation of yesterday and reading from the 1990 *Hansard*: I'm assuming they're the same:

to recognize and honour senior citizens . . . to highlight the positive contribution that seniors are making in their communities, and . . .

The third one is the one I want to speak to.

. . . to promote the understanding of and encourage positive attitudes towards seniors.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's considerable irony and hypocrisy there, because seniors in our province today don't really feel any sense of recognition or gratitude. What they feel is resentment, and they feel anger over the government's refusal to consult with them to see what – in fact, if any – cuts in their budget could be sustained. I think it's very difficult now, timewise, for the government to try to portray that we are caring and responsible towards seniors when we didn't even sit down and discuss the plans before starting the cuts.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that this was announced in Calgary. I'd just like to draw to your attention, sir, that MLAs of Calgary in the Liberal Party were not notified that there was an event of any kind. I think that's unfortunate because I'm sure there were seniors and seniors' organizations in their constituencies that would have welcomed an opportunity to be together.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, the government has found out to their surprise and I guess to their horror what happens when people are ignored. I think it was a most unfortunate set of circumstances. Yesterday my questions were to the minister, requesting reinstatement. I hope that such a thing, such an occurrence, will never happen again, that we can insist that they be consulted. However, I think what we should do is go back to square one and start again, reinstate the cuts and sit down with the seniors and find out what their needs really are.

Mr. Speaker, it's essential that we recognize Seniors' Week. This week ought to be a time to celebrate the contributions of seniors. I deplore the fact that because of what has happened here in this province, seniors, this week of all weeks, are having to spend their time and energy, instead of in celebration, fighting to protect services that are vital to their health and well-being. I think that's a sad statement about our government, and I hope it will never reoccur.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

MS MJOLSNES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors' Week is something that certainly all of us are very proud to participate in. I think it's unfortunate, however, that Seniors' Week was not recognized formally in the House here. The associate minister has alluded to the fact that he was around the province, and he was making announcements here and there, but the point is that it was never done formally in the House, with all MLAs in the House to support the announcement of Seniors' Week. I think that sends out a certain message to the seniors of this province, something that I think they're not happy with. They want the kind of recognition that they deserve, and they deserve it within this Legislature. Certainly we have been out circulating petitions, as have senior groups and other organizations, because throughout this province there are seniors that are very concerned about the cuts that are taking place. We've had no problem with people coming into my constituency office, for example, and signing these. There's a number of people throughout the province that are very concerned.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Edmonton-Kingsway has said, many of the members of the opposition have been holding meetings throughout their ridings. They're well attended. Seniors are coming out. They're expressing their views in opposition to the cuts that have taken place. Now, I had one such meeting last week, and a number of concerns were raised and brought to my attention. Certainly seniors are concerned

about the cuts because they're on a fixed income. They don't have opportunities like others have in society, where if we are faced with certain user fees, if you like, we can go out and perhaps get a second job to try and pay for these things. Seniors don't have those kinds of options. They're very concerned about how they're going to pay for their oxygen, for example, or how they're going to pay for a special set of shoes that it takes for them to walk properly. These are real concerns that they have.

Many have said to me that they're responding in various ways. Some are simply going to quit donating, for example, to the charities that they normally donate to. They've got to come up with the money in some way to pay for some of these cuts implemented by this government. Some are contemplating whether or not their husband or wife will have to move into an auxiliary hospital because they can't afford some of these cuts. These are real concerns that seniors have. They know what's going on, and some have said that they don't know where they can cut. They're very distressed over how they're going to pay for some of these cuts. A lot of these benefits that they're receiving, Mr. Speaker, are directly related to their well-being and their health. That's what makes these cuts even more cruel and heartless.

I would say that if the government is prepared to cut programs to seniors, they certainly should be prepared to stand up in this Legislature and take some criticism in here. Certainly we've been trying to during question period, but I think the fact that they didn't announce Seniors' Week formally in the House is something that we should all be concerned about. So I'm pleased that we've had this motion brought to the House today, and I'm certainly pleased that people are in support.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say that recent initiatives by this government with respect to policies affecting seniors have been an affront to seniors in three ways. There can be no question but that these cuts announced in the most recent budget are substantive cuts to the life-style, to the health, to the support of senior citizens, who deserve much better than those cuts. Those cuts were not only substantive and significant in their own nature, but they were brought in in an arbitrary and arrogant manner.

Secondly, I would like to underline that as if that in and of itself was not bad enough, the circumstances are exacerbated by virtue of the fact that this government brought those cuts in without any significant consultation with seniors, and seniors' groups who represent them, about what services they need, how desperate they are for those given services, how the money that is allocated to seniors' services should be properly allocated.

Mr. Speaker, it is almost incomprehensible that a government who would claim to be considerate of seniors, of their contribution to this province, could possibly implement the kinds of substantive cuts and reallocations to seniors' services that they have implemented, without fully and openly consulting seniors on how those cuts and those reallocations might have been undertaken. It isn't, however, enough to say that consultation alone or lack of consultation is the problem. Let there be no misunderstanding that clearly seniors are concerned about the nature, the depth, and the rigour of these cuts.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I believe that as if those two features – the substance of the cuts and the lack of consultation – are not enough, now we have been confronted in recent weeks with an arrogant effort to deflect criticism that might motivate this

government, if it would accept it, to rectify the wrongs that they have already implemented with their budgetary measures.

In the first case, we see that they have brought out some kind of brochure which isn't clear in its explanation of what measures have been changed, what services to seniors have been reduced. Secondly, we see the minister even today trying to take credit for an announcement of Seniors' Week, an announcement of the celebration that Seniors' Week might otherwise be, in Calgary, failing to point out that his government utilized Alberta taxpayers' money to undertake that celebration, that tea party, yet did not ask opposition members who represent Calgary ridings to invite seniors from their ridings, just as they had asked government MLAs to invite seniors from their ridings. Mr. Speaker, two counts of attempting to – I don't want to use the words "cover up" – deflect criticism.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we see this week where the minister has failed to make the statement that is so traditional and so common in this Legislature about events like Seniors' Week, to make a statement, to bring it to the attention of the Legislature, to allow the Legislature to endorse this Seniors' Week celebration. Why would it be that all of a sudden, out of convenience or out of change of heart, this government would fail to do that? Because they didn't want to have this kind of debate emphasizing once again that they have affronted seniors in this province in a way that is fundamentally, completely unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, all that seniors and others in this province are asking the minister to do is to stand up and say, "I have made a mistake," simply to say: "We as a government were wrong; we shouldn't have implemented substantive cuts in the way that we did, in the manner, in the depth that we did them. We should have consulted seniors before we ever undertook to reallocate or cut services to seniors in the way that we did it, and we should never ever have tried to deflect the criticism or tried to avoid or tried to mislead people about the nature of those cuts, in fact."

Mr. Speaker, in the first place, this government mistreated the seniors of this province by arbitrary cuts. In the second place, they mistreated seniors because they never consulted them in the way they should have consulted them. In the third place, they have offended not only seniors but every other citizen of this province because they have undertaken cynical, political manipulation to deflect criticism on this very, very important policy initiative.

4:00

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Glenmore.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise here because I would like to correct the misleading representation from across the floor. As a member and chairman of Calgary caucus, I want the representatives across the way to know that they're not part of government, that they have to be elected in a majority to be government, and it was a government function in Calgary to kick off Seniors' Week. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, as part of the group that organized that with the minister – and I commend the associate minister and also the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council for the work they did in organizing the kick-off for Seniors' Week. All members from all constituencies in Calgary were invited; we picked them up and brought them. I want to tell

members opposite that seniors are very happy with the programs that this government has introduced.

As a matter of fact, we have not cut; we've increased \$75 million. I think if anyone is misrepresenting the public, it's the members opposite. I spent a lot of time talking to seniors last week and the week before that, explaining our programs, and they're very happy indeed with our programs. We are looking after the low-income seniors and have made sure that all of our seniors are aware of the programs that are in place. I would love to have some of them come and talk to the seniors there. They're happy with the programs we have in place. Many of them are willing to share some of the costs. I spent a lot of time traveling around this province from northern to southern Alberta talking to seniors' groups when I put together the paper Meeting the Need, on long-term care for seniors. They're happy to share costs.

By the year 2030 we will have peaked in our growth. Population is tripling. We can no longer afford to give seniors or anybody else everything that they want. The programs are being streamlined, and they're accepting the streamlined programs. They're receiving more programs in this province than in any other province in Canada, and I will be happy to bring you people from Edmonton to Calgary to introduce you to people who are very happy with our program. I want the members opposite to start learning about what is actually happening in facts instead of misleading the public. I want you also to know, Mr. Speaker, that the seniors in Calgary for kick-off week on Friday enjoyed the chance to speak to government MLAs and to the minister and the chairman on the seniors' programs. That was the idea of it. They have been writing letters explaining that they sincerely enjoyed the kick-off.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that what we have done is important. I think the message has to get out there, and members opposite are sure not doing it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to enter into this debate, which is intended to help recognize this week as being Seniors' Week in Alberta. I don't think there could be anything really more fitting for the Assembly to do than to have a good, down-to-earth debate about the direction of government policy as it affects seniors in this province. I think we owe it to the seniors of this province to express frankly our differing points of view about social programs and what our respective visions for their role in our province really are.

I'd like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to speak about some personal efforts that I've made this week to formally recognize Seniors' Week in Alberta. Yesterday I sponsored in my constituency office a round table discussion with representatives of various seniors' organizations in Calgary-Mountain View, and I'd like to take a moment or two to reflect to members of the Legislature some of the comments that were expressed to me.

What I found valuable about the luncheon, Mr. Speaker, was how people spoke frankly about their experience as seniors as it affects themselves and others. Many of them have been through the experience of caring for elderly parents, have watched them go through the final years of their lives. They are watching partners, spouses, and friends, and it's not always a happy experience for them.

[Mr. Moore in the Chair]

Even if seniors are in good health, their life is a life of uncertainty, and as people spoke about that uncertainty of physical health or of financial health, what struck me was an image of people walking on a precipice in the fear that almost anything might occur in an unexpected way that would cause them to fall off that precipice. It could be an illness, it could be an unexpected accident or something that might push them off that precipice in terms of their physical health, but just as importantly, Mr. Speaker, for many of them it could be an unforeseen change in circumstances that could push them off that precipice in a financial sort of way as well.

Many people, even though they've saved for their lifetime – many of them have property such as homes – recognize that their savings can disappear very rapidly. Many who are living on very modest and fixed incomes have watched the impact of the goods and services tax eat into their financial health. They've also watched rising costs of living eating into their income. And now, Mr. Speaker, they see government programs being introduced without any consultation and seemingly without any regard for their financial health, which can have the effect of pushing them off that financial precipice. This is really where the source of disappointment as much as of anger towards the government comes from, in the way they have arbitrarily changed these programs affecting health benefits to seniors without consulting them, without involving them, and without having any regard to their financial or physical circumstances.

This is an important issue, Mr. Speaker, because as I say, many of them are walking a fine line between making ends meet on limited incomes with modest financial cushions, modest financial means, and when a program is announced like this that is primarily directed at their health, it can have a very, very significant impact on someone who may be only making \$700 or \$600 a month. For them to have to come up with user fees or deductible payments or higher cost sharing on programs can have quite a devastating effect on their ability to keep afloat financially.

Mr. Speaker, along with our discussion came a question about the future of social programs generally and the whole question about universality of our social programs in Alberta and in Canada. Now, it's quite clear from the federal Conservative government as well as our provincial government that this is the true agenda for this government and indeed for other Liberal governments across the country as well: to really question and undermine the universality of our social programs. There are basically two ways to finance our social programs, and I don't really see too many options other than the two options. One is to provide for them through government programs supported by taxing people on a progressive basis whereby you tax more those who have the means and ability to pay that tax, or social programs can be paid for with a shift to user fees, which is really what is behind this government's recently announced policy changes.

4:10

By the way, it's also a shift that the Liberal government in Quebec has recently announced for its health care system. Notwithstanding federal legislation and the Constitution, they intend to have the right to charge a user fee in their health care system. Let's make no mistake about it: right-wing governments, whether they have a Conservative label or a Liberal label, are out to shift the financing of our social programs to greater reliance on user fees.

Now, as this affects seniors, Mr. Speaker, a number of comments have to be made. Senior citizens in Alberta and elsewhere in our country are a generation that lived through the Great Depression, and if ever there was a generation of people who are conscious of financial and money matters, it is our senior citizens. They are acutely aware of the need to be responsible in the way that programs are managed, the way money is managed. Indeed, they made some comments to me yesterday about how they have observed waste in some programs, which they feel government has a legitimate right to eliminate, and that government does have a legitimate right to work for the best efficiency in the delivery of social programs that they can.

Indeed, senior citizens don't mind paying their fair share. But I must emphasize, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line: seniors don't want to be pushed off that financial precipice whereby a government policy change or a financing change in policies puts them under. That's why nearly 13,000 people signed the petition that was tabled today. That, by the way, is one of the largest petitions, I understand, that has been tabled in this Legislature in a very long time.

It's also the reason, Mr. Speaker, why I and other members in the New Democratic caucus believe that the key to financing our social services programs for the future is not to shift them off in the form of user fees, which hit everybody on the same basis whether they make \$100,000 or \$10,000 a year, but the solution to financing our social services programs is to tax people on the basis of their ability to pay taxes. When we see some of the largest, the most wealthy, the biggest, the most powerful in our province escaping without paying any taxes whatsoever, we have to question a government that then feels they have a legitimate right to ask senior citizens to pay more for eye care and canes and oxygen when they're not prepared to go after the people who don't pay any taxes at all.

That, Mr. Speaker, in my view, is patently unfair and why so many senior citizens have reacted so angrily in this province to the program changes announced by this government recently, and why, I'm sure, the minister responsible for seniors and the minister responsible for Health were probably as surprised as anyone, but shouldn't have been surprised, to get the reaction they did recently at a public meeting in Calgary where people vented their anger at the unfairness of this government with its changes to the health care programs as it affects seniors.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

What we see more and more by governments across this country, both Liberal and Conservative, is the undermining of the universality of our social programs. They're saying that it's no longer a right of citizenship in this country, after having given your life to building this country, to enjoy the benefits and fruits of your labour, to enjoy the benefits of the wealth that you've created for all of us. New Democrats, on the other hand, say that the most fitting way for us to recognize the unfailing contribution made by seniors in every facet of our society in Canada and in Alberta is that we should recognize and support them in their declining retired years, to take from the wealth they've helped create in this province and ensure they can benefit from that in ensuring that their health is taken care of and that it doesn't push them off the precipice in order for them to receive that care.

The undermining of the universality in our social programs threatens the well-being of our seniors financially and threatens the well-being of our seniors physically in their health care.

We're saying, Mr. Speaker, that we believe that's unfair, that that's no way to recognize their contribution to Alberta society.

We call upon this government to change its policies to ensure that the seniors of this province, regardless of their means, will continue to be able to enjoy the highest standard of care in their declining years when they need it. After all, they've given their life in contributing to this province, contributing to the growth and the wealth of this province. This province, we believe, now owes it to our seniors to ensure that they're looked after and that they don't have to live their remaining years with the uncertainty and fear of poverty or of ill health which they are unable to cope with. We believe it's proper and right for the society which we're all representing in this Legislature today to ensure that that helping hand is provided and there for the seniors of our province when they need it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe Seniors' Week is being celebrated where it should be celebrated: where the seniors are, in their centres and other places throughout this province.

When I hear some of the comments that have been made: reinstate; we gave the petition of 12,000 names . . . Last Wednesday I toured three seniors' centres in my constituency along with the associate minister responsible for seniors. We talked to a number of people who attended those centres. We answered questions. We discussed things with them. One of them said, "Well, reinstate; we want everything reinstated." I said: "Okay, let me ask you a question. You signed the petition?" "Yup, we did; we want it reinstated." I said: "Are you then saying that you're prepared to go to the person who's a diabetic, who will now be able to get insulin strips, and say, 'I'm not willing to sacrifice \$260 on my dental for you to have the benefit of \$150 to \$300 a month savings that you're having trouble paying'? Are you willing to do that?" "No, no, no, no; we want them to have it too." I said: "Well, just a minute. You said you want everything reinstated. Which is it?" Then they started to think that no, maybe we have to look at it again and look at the whole benefits on those with wheelchairs, et cetera, the benefit for the motorized chair. They're not necessarily prepared to say, "We want one thing back and not the others."

Where are the cuts? We added. We added the diabetic part; we added motorized wheelchairs. Mr. Speaker, do you know the misinformation that's out there? One person came to the meeting concerned that they may have to go someday to a nursing home, and that as soon as they checked into the nursing home – somebody had told them; it was at some broadcast or some news coverage or something – they would lose their home. Right away their home's gone; they have no place to go back to if they get better. That was their concern because of all the stories out there. That is the feeling in some of the comments that were out there about what would happen to them.

Are the opposition parties saying they don't want seniors in nursing homes to have medical . . .

4:20

MR. McEACHERN: You know nobody said that.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, he knows nobody said that.

MR. SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. Order please.

Edmonton-Kingsway, would you be good enough to read Standing Order 13(4)(b)? You've had your chance to be . . . [interjection] Order please. Order. These rules apply to you as well as to me. Order.

Cypress-Redcliff.

Debate Continued

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Are they saying they don't want seniors in nursing homes to have their drugs paid? They must be. They're saying they want everything reinstated as it existed before the budget was brought down, no moving around of the money, no new things added, reinstate it all. I'm sure the seniors out there – and I know many of them that signed the petition – now that they've read the information, now that they've read the booklet that's out there, wish they hadn't signed it, because they weren't being given the true information that is out there affecting their services.

AN HON. MEMBER: Name them.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Speaker, the members must be feeling a little bit guilty. They've had their chance to speak; they keep on wanting to speak again to clarify their position, I suppose.

MR. DAY: Distort.

MR. HYLAND: Or to distort their position or whatever.

Mr. Speaker, some of the services that are provided to seniors in this province have been changed. The services in Aids to Daily Living have also been changed to other people. I know of some seniors who, as I said, will receive assistance on the strips for testing for diabetes, who are very happy that's included, because it now enables them to have up to \$300 a month other income they're able to use or they're not having to use their savings to buy these strips. And these people want to take that away from it.

Mr. Speaker, I can well remember some of the comments made by my grandfather many years ago, just before he passed away, long before virtually any of these services that are now provided to seniors. They weren't provided in those days, about 25 years ago. I can remember him saying he came from Ontario in 1915 to a rugged country and worked and built that country, retired at least three times in his lifetime, and he hoed sugar beets for the first time at 82 years old. He was somebody who wanted to participate in the country. He was proud of this province, he was proud of what he had built in his time in this province, and I am proud to have carried on from him in participating and building and working towards this province.

As I said when I started, Mr. Speaker, the place to celebrate Seniors' Week is with the seniors out there where it's all happening, where they are, meeting with them. Because of the Legislature session we did our celebration of Seniors' Week last week. The hon. member opposite who is laughing now should know that there is more in this province than the city of Edmonton. This is a big province. Edmonton is not even at the centre of this province; it's south of the centre of this province.

MR. DAY: Which member was laughing?

MR. HYLAND: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

This is a big province. There are a lot of seniors in this province. Get out and talk to them. When people write letters to them, Mr. Speaker, at least put all the information in them. Don't just put half of it in. Don't put half of the information in there and leave the other half untold so that people get scared.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Rocky Mountain House.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Edmonton-Jasper Place, I would like to stand in my place and recognize the contribution of elderly persons in the province of Alberta, those who built our province, those who in their later years have tried to make a life for themselves which will not be a burden to their families and which will enable them to make an ongoing contribution to our community.

I was wondering how long it would take a member of government to turn this issue into an attack on the city of Edmonton. It took an hour or so, but it didn't take long for Cypress-Redcliff to turn it around that way.

I really think that when the government members put this issue of the question of the cutbacks in seniors' benefits as a problem in consultation, they really missed the boat. It was so far from consultation that in fact it was more like a Pearl Harbour style of attack, and all of these things that were done in the provincial budget were never part of the media hype and the publicity that came out of the budget. It wasn't until members of the opposition and seniors started digging deep within the confines of the budget documents themselves that we determined such gems as the fact that most seniors will have to pay up to \$500 more every year for medical and surgical supplies and rehabilitation equipment than they had to pay previously under the extended health benefit program.

We find out under the heading of extended health benefits dealing with dental care that an average senior can expect to pay up to \$150 more just for regular dental care and 20 percent more for major repair work in the dental area; that there is now an additional cost dealing with dentures in the amount of \$150 to \$280 and up to \$40 for relining which wasn't there previously; that in the eye care area seniors have to pay up to \$50 more for a pair of glasses, depending on the cost of frames; and that under the drug program many of the medications that seniors are taking have now been classed as ineligible on the grounds that they are available without a prescription. Suddenly, none of those are going to be covered, and depending on which of those medications and preparations a senior is involved in, they're somewhere in the vicinity of \$15 or more on a monthly basis, which could be into the hundreds of dollars on an annual basis. The annual \$100 grant for home heating was also terminated in the budget.

Now, I think the point needs to be made that our social programs are as much a part of every Albertan's income as the cash they are paid on a daily basis, so that when an elderly person contemplates retirement, which is really removing a source of daily, weekly, monthly income, they have to make some pretty shrewd and some pretty delicate calculations, because as has been mentioned, seniors don't have the option of taking a second job or even changing jobs or in some other way increasing their income. They're at a point where they have to try to make do on what's available through various pension plans, which may or may not be indexed or may be partially indexed or, if you're a retired public servant, indexed at the

whim of the cabinet; where they may be drawing on savings, RRSPs, and other sorts of income which they can't turn around and adjust. They can't go and negotiate with an employer for more income, they can't change jobs, and they don't always have the option of taking employment. That's particularly true, Mr. Speaker, of people who tend to rely on the Aids to Daily Living program, on the various health care benefits programs, because chances are the more reliant you are on the health care system, the less likely you are to seek paid employment as a way of dealing with these cutbacks.

You know, when you're dealing with somebody's income, particularly when they don't have the ability to make adjustments in that area, it seems to me there's a special obligation to act with care and to make certain that the consequences are somewhere within the realm of feasibility as far as the recipient person is concerned. I don't think the government has any idea on that score. To sort of produce pamphlets after the fact and try to convince people that there's more money being spent overall really does deny the hardship that this type of initiative may take.

4:30

Now, it's interesting, the first response of the Premier in reply to questions by the Leader of the Opposition on April 25, 1991. He said, and I believe that was in the Chamber: I have friends who are over 65 and make a million dollars a year, and I wonder if they require all the benefits of others who really need it. I think that's similar to a point that other members in this debate have made without necessarily using the million dollar a year figure. Well, Mr. Speaker, you may be interested to know that 75 percent of Alberta's seniors have an annual income that's below \$20,000 per annum. That's about as far from the million dollar level as one can possibly imagine.

In this day and age surviving on an income of \$20,000 doesn't leave a lot of room to manoeuvre. When you get a \$500 bill for medical and surgical supplies, a bill in the neighbourhood of \$150 for dental care, \$150 or more for dentures if those are required, \$50 extra for a pair of glasses, and additional monthly sums for medications that were previously required, irrespective of the arguments on the home heating program, that can take a pretty big dent. I don't think it takes a lot of imagination to see that that's far from a recognition of the ongoing contribution of seniors. In fact, I think it would take away from their ability to make a contribution to our society.

So I simply make the point that if we're going to recognize the contribution of seniors and recognize that it is, as it ought to be, an ongoing one, then we have to recognize that when things like this affect them very deeply, it's not enough to simply hide it in the budget documents, it's not enough to try to send out documents by the bushel, by the hundreds of thousands to try to . . . You can't mislead a senior who faces these kinds of cutbacks on what's happened to them. There's no physical way that you can convince a senior who has to pay these extra amounts that it's not happening to them, because it is. What perhaps the government thinks they can do is to convince people who don't suffer these direct cutbacks that there isn't a problem. Well, all that does is to deny the experience of one group of Albertans for the purposes of misleading another. I think that, in this week where we recognize seniors' contributions to our society, is - I suppose the term "arrogant" was used, but I think it goes beyond that. It belies an approach to politics which denies the real-life experience of the seniors in our province.

So I hope we pass this motion, and I hope with it comes the resolve that those who have the privilege of being members of

government – with all due respect to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who says that people who aren't part of government have no right to participate in things. When you have that special privilege of being part of a government, with that comes a responsibility to make certain that you understand the effect of what you're doing on people and that you are prepared when they rise up in great numbers and say that you've done something which hurts them that they hadn't planned on because they'd made certain decisions based on the way things were. You have an obligation to recognize that. I hope the government will, and I hope this will be a step forward for all Albertans.

MR. SPEAKER: Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to make a few comments in honour of our seniors in this very important week set aside for that very purpose.

I am very fortunate that I have both my parents still living. Both are seniors. Having been the third generation on our farm, I personally have been very much affected by the contribution that seniors have made to this province. I am also fortunate enough to have in our family a number of letters written by my grandparents back shortly after the turn of the century describing the conditions in those years and the very difficult situations that they were in. It's really interesting when I listen to the comments that the opposition is making about the tremendous hardships and then look back at what real hardship was. There certainly is no comparison.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard a lot of comments about what seniors have done in the past, and it's all very true, but I think it's very important that we also recognize the contribution that seniors are making today. When we look at the volunteers in the province, in so many cases we find that seniors are spending large amounts of time volunteering their services in various things that are nonprofit and doing it for the good of other people and our society. Certainly, to set aside a week and to honour them I think is extremely important. I find it very disturbing when we watch what the opposition has done in the last few days. There's a word that is unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker, so I won't use it, but it sure describes what has been happening in the last month or so. The idea that you would go out and really upset people, really worry them, and then come in this House and pretend that you want to honour them: I really have difficulty with that.

Mr. Speaker, I think when we look at the programs that this province and this government offer to our seniors, we realize that the seniors who are really strapped, who really do have a problem with income are protected. There are so many of these things. If you are even up to the point of having an income of \$880 a month, you pay nothing for many of these services, and that's the way it should be. But when we have people running around scaring these poor folks into believing that they're going to have things taken away from them and not be able to enjoy life, I really find that difficult to believe. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Standing Order 13(4)(b). Do you have a point of order?

AN HON. MEMBER: Sorry.

MR. SPEAKER: Then please follow the rules.
Carry on, Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to echo what the hon. Member for Cypress-Redcliff said when he said that it doesn't just happen in this location. It happens throughout the province, and we should be out there celebrating with the seniors. Certainly that is what many of us have been doing.

It was really interesting in Red Deer the other day at the constitutional hearings. A senior that I had never met, had no idea where she's from, when she realized that I was an MLA, she came up to me in the hall and commented that she didn't understand what all the fuss is about. She said that she had been to three other provinces, and when she came to Alberta and saw what this government in this province is providing for the seniors, she was just appalled that people would carry on the way they are.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I want to once again thank our seniors for all they are doing for us, all they have done in the past, and am only too happy that we have set aside a week that we would honour them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

[Motion carried]

4:40
head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Written Questions

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I move that the written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places on the Order Paper except for 281, 344, 367, 386, and 387.

[Motion carried]

Social Services Recentralization

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

- (1) What was the cost in terms of manpower spent by the Department of Family and Social Services to plan the recentralization of regional offices to Edmonton, and
- (2) how many positions will be relocated as a result of this recentralization?

MR. HORSMAN: Reject.

Loan Guarantees

344. Mr. Chumir asked the government the following question: What are the details, including beneficiary, amount, and terms and conditions, of all loan guarantees included under the "other" category as at March 31, 1990, and December 31, 1990, as specified on page 42 of the government's 1991 Budget Address?

MR. HORSMAN: Reject.

Farm Fuel Subsidy Program

367. Mr. Taylor asked the government the following question:

- (1) How many farmers received subsidies under the farm fuel subsidy program during the 1989-90 fiscal year, and what was the total cost to the government,
- (2) how many of the farmers who received the subsidy in the 1989-90 fiscal year had gross receipts over \$10,000, and

- (3) how much money will the changes in the farm fuel subsidy program that were announced on August 1, 1990, save the government in the 1990-91 fiscal year, and what are the anticipated savings for the 1991-92 fiscal year?

MR. HORSMAN: Reject.

Petroleum Plaza

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

- (1) What is the number of square feet involved in the payment of \$4,117,464 to Petroleum Plaza Investments Ltd. and Canapen (Petroleum Plaza) Ltd. by the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services during the fiscal year 1989-90, and
- (2) has a cost/effect study been done as to the merits of continuing to rent space in Petroleum Plaza versus occupation of the old federal building?

MR. HORSMAN: Reject.

Self-insurance

387. Mr. Decore asked the government the following question: Has the government conducted a study of the merits of self-insurance, and what were the results of that study?

MR. HORSMAN: Reject.

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places on the Order Paper except for Motion 377.

[Motion carried]

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

CLERK: Motion 377, Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is kind of unusual, because yesterday the response to the motion for a return was in fact tabled in the House by the Solicitor General. Therefore, because of his enlightened approach, with which I'm very pleased and I thank him for that, there is no longer any need to deal with Motion for a Return 377. So under Standing Order 45 I would request the unanimous consent of the Legislature to withdraw the motion because it's no longer necessary.

MR. SPEAKER: There's a request for unanimous consent. All those in favour of granting unanimous consent, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Perhaps Calgary-North West would now like to move Motion for a Return 377.

Impaired Driving Programs

377. Mr. Bruseker moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing how many copies of the book *Effective Strategies to Combat Drinking and Driving* were published, what was the total cost of publication of these books, who received copies of this book, and what was the cost of distribution to all of those people.

MR. BRUSEKER: If the Government House Leader would like to deal with it, the motion deals with a request which, I'll reiterate, has in fact been responded to. The motion for a return was asking for copies and expenses of a booklet entitled *Effective Strategies to Combat Drinking and Driving*. The response has been tabled. The reason for the request at the time simply was, and I guess still is in a sense, to find out why and what the government was doing with respect to producing a particular booklet of this nature. That was the reason for it, and I have received that reply.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Summation? Call for the question.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Education Partnerships

216. Moved by Mr. Hyland:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to stimulate the building of an effective partnership between schools, parents, businesses, and communities by encouraging parents, businesses, and communities to become better involved in schools.

MR. SPEAKER: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In debating the motion, I'd like to break my comments into two or three parts and then cover some of the contents of the motion. I would hope other members would then participate and cover the motion, too, and would urge members to support the motion.

Initially, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I believe it is important that some of the discussion that we've heard of late as to having levels of federal government involved in education and the setting of parameters for education, et cetera, would indeed be against the purpose and the intent of my motion. To truly carry out the motion as outlined and presented before the Assembly, it would work better when you have the levels of government closer together, as they exist now, and have the Department of Education and schoolteachers, actual classroom teachers, involved in the drafting of curriculum, in the changing of curriculum. Perhaps in some cases we should look at even having parents involved or in a review situation regarding curriculum as well. If that closeness was taken away and farther removed and direction was coming from Ottawa, you would be dealing with people in a department, just because of the amount of business, rather than having the ability to deal with the MLAs or cabinet ministers. I believe that section 93 in the Act as it now exists that keeps elementary education under provincial jurisdiction should indeed stay there and remain in there for the future.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about community schools. In my constituency I don't have any community schools that are funded as community schools which receive additional funding. But I have many community schools in the constituency – what one would think of as a community school – schools that have the community active in them, that are shared for recreation use or in some cases, for example in Grassy Lake, where they have a culture group that brings in various entertainment shows, three or four throughout the year. That's very successful for a small town. Those activities take place in the school. The thought of the principal and the students and the board of education is to keep schools like that as a community school. Even though they don't receive the extra funding for it, they are, I believe, a true community school because they are the focal point of the community.

I think of the school where two of my children go, the elementary school in Bow Island, where parents go into the classroom to assist the teachers, to help them with various things. One can argue that there should be enough extra staff there so that parents don't have to go in. But, Mr. Speaker, I believe in this case parents in the classroom in that situation lend an interesting slant to the education of the children because they see what happens in the classroom. They see the interaction between the student and the teacher. When something happens in the school, they understand it. They don't in most cases overreact, or at least those that go into the school don't overreact, to something that may happen in the school. I think if that was carried out through various other levels of schools and other schools in the province – I know it happens in my constituency, and I would assume it happens in others. I wait to hear comment from other members about parent involvement in the classroom.

My wife and I go in on a rotation basis. They have a list of parents who do help. Mr. Speaker, in many cases it's the parents who juggle their schedule of things they have to be at to go to the classroom who take the interest to go. I would like to see us being able to do things that would encourage other people who do have the time, to make it interesting for them to go into the classroom to watch their child being educated; not that they have to go, but make it interesting so they would go. If you could get them in the classroom, I think you would get them coming back, because I find it interesting. When you go in there, you should see the shine on your child's face when you're in their classroom helping their teacher. They're proud that their mother or father is there, and then they can talk to their classmates.

Parents go in and do such things as assist them in whatever they're doing in their work centres, whether it's learning to use a dictionary, whatever. The last time I was in the classroom, they were learning to use a dictionary. I should say, Mr. Speaker, that you've known me for quite a while and other members have known me for quite a while, and a lot know how good my spelling is. It was quite a challenge to teach somebody how to use a dictionary when you spell like I do, but we found all the words. It was an interesting exercise. These kinds of things, when you're down on the floor with the kids on the mats and you're teaching them something . . . To achieve those times, I freely change my schedule so that I can do that, and so does my wife and so do many fathers and mothers, although I must say that I think there's only a couple of fathers who go into the school, and that's unfortunate. But there's a large number of mothers.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, in February the local ATA in the north part of the county of Forty Mile invited the hon. Minister of Education down to tour the schools in the Bow Island-Burdett area. We spent a whole day touring the schools, meeting with the local ATA, and meeting with parent advisory groups as well. We went into the first school at 8:30, met with some of the staff, and then went through the elementary school, Gershaw school, St. Mike's separate school in Bow Island, and the school in Burdett, as well as met with both school boards over supper and the parent advisory committees later at my home. I'm sure that the minister had an interesting day, because he was also down on the mat with those kids watching what they were doing in their work centres in the schools he was at. We had interesting discussions in the other schools. I think those kinds of things are necessary and that we need to truly have community schools where the whole community, business sector, et cetera, is involved in education. We need to work hard to do these things. We can't take these kinds of things for granted, that automatically the teachers are going to teach everything to the children, because as parents and as other members of society and, in many cases, through our own religions we take on special responsibilities as related to godparents, et cetera. You have these responsibilities towards education, and we should take these seriously and become involved and stay involved in the education of children in our area.

In the 16 years that I've been a member of the Legislature, at least once a year, and more often if possible, I've made visits to almost every school in my constituency to talk about government through some of their various social studies projects and just to visit with educators, to visit with teachers on a yearly or twice-yearly basis to discuss education and curriculum, the rate of change, et cetera, so that I can, at least to the best of my ability, stay in touch with what's going on in the education system and in schools.

Mr. Speaker, I think, too, an important part of schools as an integral part of the community is such things as school concerts, whether they be Christmas concerts or the concert at the end of the year or whatever. I know when I go to the one that the twins go to, there are usually 50 or 60 people there, and that is at least one or two parents for every kid that's in that school. I know others aren't quite that successful at achieving that, but I do know that the principal and staff at that school work very hard in keeping parent involvement in that school, and parents are always welcome to come in and look in the classroom to see what's happening.

I think it's important for the child to see that parents are in those classrooms and go to those things like concerts, et cetera. My older son was in a play that I was unable to go to because of session, but one of our friends taped it with a video camera, and we were able to watch it last week at home. It was a great disappointment for him that I wasn't able to be there to share that play, to share the action, et cetera. Yet in that town 40 or 50 people – parents, grandparents, et cetera – came to watch those 4, 5, and 6 kids put on that play. They said it was good, the kids enjoyed it, and the teachers enjoyed doing it with them.

Also during Education Week I had the opportunity to go to a school in Redcliff where for the final day, the Friday afternoon, they had put on a concert. For grade school it was – every kid in the school was involved in some form or another in this musical selection concert, and it was really very good. There were 10 or 15 parents at that school, and even that is a goodly number compared to what sometimes happens and what

happens in other places. Again, you could see those kids, the shine on their face when they see their parents there.

Mr. Speaker, there is a big difference, I believe, between rural schools and city schools, not necessarily in the education in those schools but in the way the education is arrived at and what happens towards their education. I admit I haven't been in very many city schools – maybe one or two is all – whereas I've been in many rural schools. We have fewer kids; we have dedicated teachers; we have dedicated board members; we have dedicated parent advisory committee members. I think sometimes we assume that because a school is not large, the education quality in that school is not good. I believe that's a false assumption that is being removed as people go from place to place and go from school to school.

I think one of the teachers in Bow Island put it as well as could be that problems vary. For example, his comment was:

Our young people respect their building, don't vandalize it and make do with the amounts of money our tax base and provincial government gives them.

As far as the drug problem,

The only drug problem we find in our halls is the occasional student asking to use tylenol when he has a headache.

A comment that many schools can't make just because of the problems with society. I'm sure other members, especially the Member for Stony Plain, will be able to tell us some of the unique problems of different schools in their area that are maybe even a mixture of rural and urban kids and the special problems that they may have.

Mr. Speaker, last Friday night, as one of my friend's children graduated from grade 12, I was invited to attend the graduation exercise in the school. It obviously is the highlight of the school season, and the pride of those parents and the pride of those kids in achieving that milestone in their life was something to see. You see the students come up and receive their diplomas for attending 12 years of education, then see them do the grand march where they all come in with their parents. To see the pride that those students and their parents exhibited – in many ways, maybe, saying, "Thank God I got my child to this stage," and we look for the next stage later – the pride that was there and the pride in the community was something that was interesting. That again is nice to share with others and share with your friends.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, I believe that to go along with such a motion, we must have parent advisory committees that are active not just in name but in working with the teachers and with the administration not only in the schools but in the county or school district, that they take part. Just to briefly outline some of the activities of parent advisory committees in my area. For example, the small school at Schuler: the parent advisory committee got together and through various donations and through money from some of the agencies that are funded by lotteries raised about \$20,000 to build a playground. This is a school with about 50 to 60 students. They did this by themselves. Manyberries area parents got together and because of the tremendous distances that they have to travel obtained a bus to move their kids to basketball, volleyball, et cetera, those kinds of things. Other communities, such as Foremost, are attempting to put together moneys to buy a bus as well. In our hometown school parent advisory committees, besides assisting with ideas in the school, are doing such things as a hot lunch program. Once a month or once every two months they have a hot lunch. Kids can have various things, from pizza to hamburgers to . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Junk food.

MR. HYLAND: No. No junk food. The hon. member says "junk food." My wife is chairman of that committee, and she doesn't serve them junk food on those occasions. The rest of the time they may well eat junk food.

Last year in June they even had a hot lunch where various leaders in the community barbecued hamburgers. I guess some of the high school students came back three and four times for their hamburgers. It took a little longer than normal to get the barbecue over.

Mr. Speaker, these may seem like little things, but they are important in the community involvement, in the community operation of a school. Those little things and those involvements grow into pride, and those children who see their parents involved I believe will go on, and when they have children of their own, they will become involved. That will grow as time goes on. We need that involvement in our school system to keep it to the standard that it's at and to keep the uniqueness of that school system.

Mr. Speaker, we have, even in our area, business involvement, such things as work experience and things like that that I believe need to continue. Students get a chance to work in drugstores or hardware stores or implement agencies and various other businesses in town. As part of their curriculum students spend half a day at the business and half a day at school. In some cases students have liked that, and they have decided to go towards that as a career. In some cases where they have gone out and it's been hard work, they've decided that maybe they should go back to school and buckle down and get a little more education. That's worked that way as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would also hope that as the various chambers in communities become more active and the province becomes more active, they also participate with school boards and with the Department of Education and others in review of the curriculum so that they can lend a business attitude towards some of the curricula and some of the way things happen in schools so that students understand how business works and how things work in society. I think it would be a great benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members for support of this motion so we could vote on it this afternoon and then forward it on to the Minister of Education.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond in this debate. I'm also pleased to support the motion presented by the hon. Member for Cypress-Redcliff. However, I think to support it without a few observations would perhaps be quite improper.

The first observation I make is that he feels the need for it. I think it is a very accurate reflection of what the government has not been doing that a member finds a need to urge the government to do their job. On that basis I say that I'm totally supportive of him.

Some of the comments that the member made, however, I think deserve a bit of clarification. The quick whistling over of the federal standards and making that into a position saying that the bureaucrats from Ottawa would automatically be running the education system in the province is, I think, stretching it somewhat. I might point out that our current Minister of Education is in fact involved in discussing a method of setting up national yardsticks, national measurings, some method of

comparing ourselves to the rest of the country on the same playing field. Mr. Speaker, I submit that there is nothing wrong with having some sort of national standard for education. I would, however, qualify that to a degree by saying that having a national standard does not mean having national interference in education.

The thing is that we have to keep in mind that we are constantly trying to do a self-evaluation, and in the process we end up comparing ourselves to other parts of this country and indeed other parts of the world. Our comparison, regardless of what people say, to other parts of the country is very good. I might re-emphasize that Stony Plain Memorial composite high school, a school with both urban and rural students, last year was second in the National Academic Decathlon, and this year they are first. So we can say, at least in this particular area of the province, that the students seem to be addressing the academic portion of school.

The member made reference to section 93 of the School Act and how somehow or other that would keep schooling under provincial control. Either my School Act has got a different numbering system or else there was an error made, because I believe section 93 would refer to the qualifications or, more specifically, deal with unqualified teachers. However, that's just a minor point. I don't know of any place in the School Act where it would be held as provincial or not.

One of the areas that was looked at quite some years ago to get a broader participation of the community, and in fact of parents, into the education system resulted in the establishment of community schools. I think a distinction has to be made between what a community school is and what the community use of schools is. The hon. Member for Cypress-Redcliff is referring to primarily community use of schools, which I again fully endorse. I think those buildings are there and, if used properly, should be available for the community to use.

However, the concept of community schools goes somewhat beyond that, and that is where we extend the school experience to members in the community, where we have members in the community in fact operating these programs. I think community schools are a plus to each and every community in which you might find them. I find it quite unfortunate that in 1987 this government chose to cut the feet out from under community schools by cutting the funding in half and by niggardly keeping that process in place and, in fact, not even approving schools that had met the requirements of charters. So on the one hand there is this lip service given to involving the public in the school system in a more direct way, and then the actual actions of the government tend to negate that very cause. I would like to see the number of community schools increase so long as they meet their mandate. I would like to see the funding of schools increased to where it should be, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

If we look at the preamble to the School Act, I think it shows us quite well, to some degree, the rights of parents in education. However, that particular preamble falls a little bit short in outlining the actual participation, as the hon. member alluded to, in terms of parent groups and in terms of getting in and volunteering in the school. Now, the participation of the parent advisory councils, as outlined under, I believe, section 17 of the School Act, came with the change to the Act in 1988 and actually emanated from some background material that was sought out in a document that, I believe, was referred to as something called Partners in Education. It's unfortunate again that section 17 was written and sort of forgotten about, because

I would have to agree with the member that one of the most effective tools that we have surrounding the schools is the parent advisory council. The promotion of these councils and their involvement is certainly something that will identify one school as compared to another. We should be looking at some way of taking these parent councils and promoting them.

There were references made also in the debate with respect to rural versus urban schools. I do agree that the quality of education is a direct reflection of the quality of staff and the parental support that you have and the clientele in a school. However, I think we would be deluding ourselves if we tried to say that because we have a good program-delivery mechanism, because of the calibre of the people in there, that everything is equal, because it is not. The one thing that you do have in a larger school is a much, much broader scope of programming. As a matter of fact, the options in some schools in the city would outnumber the high school students in a great number of the rural communities. Having said that, however, I feel very strongly that the schools, regardless of the size, as long as they're contributing to a community should be maintained, and we should make every effort to ensure that education is available in the communities where the students are, as opposed to trying to bus them halfway across the province under some guise of economies of scale.

This would indicate to me that much, much more work has to be done in improving an initiative and defining the initiative far better than it is now, the initiative being something called distance education. That is a small method, a small way of trying to deliver some sort of programming to students in rural Alberta. The problem has to be addressed now. Until we can reverse the trend of people leaving rural Alberta, in fact the problem of the quality of education in their schools is going to increase. I feel that there is a dire need now for the provincial government to assume responsibility for small schools. I'll only point to the demonstration that was held in front of this building by the parents and children from Cherhill when they wanted to maintain their school. I thought it was a real crime that the local jurisdictions along with the silence of the political people put these people into such stress that they had to actually demonstrate in front of this Legislature to keep a school open. That, I think, is an embarrassment that no government would be proud of. I would be on record as totally in favour of the provincial government exercising its responsibility to small communities and small schools and ensuring that they are not victims of something called depopulation and that parents in fact are given the opportunity to participate as volunteers, as observers in the classrooms which their children attend.

There are two areas of partnership that the member didn't touch on. One area, and I think it's a very important one, has to do on a bit of a broader scale with that whole area of native education. Certainly if we are going to go beyond paying lip service to the needs of natives in education, we're going to have to get together – the provincial level, the local level, the native representatives, and the federal people – and actually start to address what is needed and what is wanted and what can be accomplished in native education, Mr. Speaker.

I had the privilege of being a principal of a mixed school – as a matter of fact, it's the only school of its kind in the country – for 13 years before I was promoted, or demoted, into this particular position. I can say that when you look at co-operation between communities, it works very, very well, to the benefit of all concerned. While I was principal in that school, we had another little activity that the member across alluded to, and that was something called a hot lunch program. The only difference

is that instead of running pizzas once a week and a hamburger every other week, we ran a hot lunch program every day of every week for every student whose parents felt they could benefit from it. It's a program that I think this government could have a good look at and could look at implementing into schools all across this province, both rural and urban. I would think that if they looked at it realistically and got involved with local boards, they would be pleasantly surprised to find that the cost in dollars and cents of implementing such a program is quite small, and the social benefits in terms of having children well nourished and well fed in a classroom, especially at the elementary level, is almost immeasurable. I would stress to the member opposite that he could talk to his colleague the Minister of Education and perhaps awaken him to the viability of introducing hot lunch on a far broader scale than just throwing a little bit of money and a little bit of hope here and there to local boards but actually do it in a fashion that would show results.

The one area that I think the province has to look at in terms of partnerships, in terms of exploiting, if you will, the involvement of parents is something that is needed more in the city and appears more in the cities than in the rural areas, and that's something that is generically referred to as the Head Start programs. These programs are directed at helping parents and children to familiarize themselves and acclimatize themselves with a variety of things relating to the school scene. What it does is involve parents directly in the classroom, and it prepares their children for the more formal years of school so that they can be successful. Although I'm sure there aren't any definitive studies that you could put your finger on, the general feeling is that students who get started in the Head Start program are significantly more successful than the children who are not. I would attribute that largely to the fact that the parents of these children are involved right from the very beginning and thereby have an appreciation for a school and an understanding of the requirements of school and instill this into their children, so when the children get a little older and enter into school directly, they then become perhaps significantly more successful.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Speaking on the Head Start program brings us to the other area, again largely to do with the urban areas but not restricted to the urban area, and that's something called special needs. I think Alberta Education has been very, very negligent in not addressing this particular area with a little bit of vigour, a little bit of understanding, and an awful lot more planning. The business of just putting money into the pockets of three or four boards is fine; I don't object to it. But there has to be some monitoring, some measuring, some expectations, and some method of expanding the programs beyond what the seed money of the pilot projects can entail.

5:20

I also find it very interesting that all of the boards that are involved with receiving this funding have inevitably, as one of their methods of using the money, chosen to put some of it towards the Head Start program. Yet I also find it a blatant omission on the part of the government in that they have not tied in Head Start formally to the K to 5 programming in the areas of this province where Head Start or a program similar to it would be desirable and in fact is needed and would meet the needs of a lot of the children that we have getting ready to go into school.

The motion indicated that there should be "partnership between schools, parents, businesses." The hon. member did not allude to anything with respect to businesses. I do, quite frankly, support that particular notion of business involvement in his motion also. I find it quite significant that this particular concept is not new; it's not novel; however, it is having a lot of difficulty in getting implemented. For example, I believe Saanich, British Columbia, is one of the first areas that had the partnership program set up. The board in Saanich set up programs with businesses and also with community organizations such as senior citizens' homes. Now, the business aspect is being tried in various areas in Alberta, both in the city and outside. I understand, for example, that Alberta Government Telephones, now known or soon to be known as Telus, is twinned with Victoria composite in the city. In the town of Stony Plain there are various businesses being twinned with the high school there, and the school in Spruce Grove is currently investigating a twinning up. I think it would be quite significant to take and expand that twinning from the high school level down into the elementary and junior high schools.

I alluded to a comment with respect to the seniors. In towns where you have formally organized seniors' lodges or drop-in centres or what have you, I think it's very appropriate that these groups get together with schools. I've seen this in action, and it's a remarkable interaction between the seniors and the children, especially the younger children, and I think that's something that could be and should be pursued more vigorously throughout the province.

I'll close by making reference to another area that is starting to come out in Stony Plain, and I happen to be very supportive of this particular venture. I think it's indicative of one of the partnerships that the member was alluding to. That's having alumni associations growing up around high schools. We're finding we've got a situation in Stony Plain where that particular alumni association is growing quite active and being very supportive of the school and being accepted throughout the community, both from the current school age and from the graduates also.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say that I support the spirit of the motion from the Member for Cypress-Redcliff, and I do commend him for bringing it forward. I look forward to supporting it in the future.

Thank you.

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Speaker, since the debate began before 5:10 and would not normally be carried over, I wonder if I could have unanimous assent of the Assembly that the motion keep its place on the Order Paper.

MR. SPEAKER: There is the request. The request can be made.

Those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Speaker, I would then adjourn debate for this afternoon.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries.
Government House Leader.

Assembly stand adjourned until such time as the Committee of
the Whole rises and reports.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, this evening it's proposed to
deal with a number of Bills on the Order Paper for committee
study. I would therefore move that when the members assemble
this evening, they so do in Committee of the Whole and the

[Motion carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]