

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Tuesday, June 11, 1991**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 91/06/11

[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. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition from 28 Albertans regarding the dental treatment of temporomandibular joint disorders. This petition requests that these disorders be reinstated in Alberta health care insurance for assessment and basic splint therapy. These were discontinued as of May 1 this year.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition today signed by 228 Albertans asking for an inquiry by the provincial government into the matter of the sale of contaminated diesel fuel at the Hinton Husky car/truck stop in May of 1990.

head:

Introduction of Bills**Bill 265****Telemarketing Act**

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 265, the Telemarketing Act. The purpose of this Bill is to provide some guidelines and regulations for a blossoming industry in the province.

[Leave granted; Bill 265 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file with the Assembly today the responses to written questions 388 and 389.

As well, I'd like to table the annual report of the Department of Transportation and Utilities for the fiscal period 1989-90.

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly copies of a report prepared by the provincial medical consultant's office of Alberta Health entitled High Users of Health Care Services: Utilization and Interventions.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file with the Assembly the National Inventory of Environmental Research and Development Projects.

MR. SPEAKER: Solicitor General.

MR. FOWLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the required number of copies of the Health Disciplines Board investigation of midwifery report. It is the final report with recommendations.

head:

Introduction of Special Guests

MRS. MCCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four visitors from my constituency. They are Mr. Norman Storch and his wife, Leona, and Jason and Teresa. Mr. Storch is a member of the Premier's Council on Science and Technology as well as a board member of the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute and has provided some very valuable input to us. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the Member for West Yellowhead I'd like to introduce three Albertans who are with us today: two gentlemen from Hinton, Mr. Karl Holba and Mr. Roland Sergeew, as well as Mr. Keith Sandmaier from Lloydminster. All three of these gentlemen were affected by the contaminated diesel fuel incident in Hinton last year.

head:

Ministerial Statements**Midwifery**

MR. SPEAKER: Solicitor General.

MR. FOWLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of the hon. members of this Assembly are aware that the Health Disciplines Board recently completed a review of the practice of midwifery to determine if it could be regulated under the Health Disciplines Act. Today I am pleased to have been able to table the report of the board before this Assembly. The board has recommended that the practice of midwifery be regulated under the Health Disciplines Act because the risks inherent in midwifery practice warrant regulation through professional legislation.

In making this recommendation, the board acknowledged that several of the organizations stating support or acceptance of legislative recognition of midwives also identified significant issues related to the recognition of this practice. With this in mind the board recognized that it was essential that continued dialogue take place among these groups. Consequently, we have decided to delay final legislation until this dialogue has occurred.

In addition to the Health Disciplines Act other legislative instruments to regulate the practice of midwifery will be considered. I am pleased to announce the establishment of the Midwifery Services Review Committee to continue the dialogue about midwifery. This committee will have representation from the Alberta Association of Midwives, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, the Alberta Health Care Association, and the Health Unit Association. This committee will be chaired by a member of the general public and will be required to report its findings to the provincial government by December 31, 1991.

I won't take the time of this Assembly to discuss the terms of reference of this committee, but I have tabled them along with the report of the board. However, I do want to mention that the terms of reference are broader than those envisioned by the board. In its investigation the board was naturally restricted to its mandate, established in the Act, and therefore it could not

pay close attention to other legislative instruments besides the Health Disciplines Act to regulate midwifery. We would like this committee to examine other possible legislative instruments.

The board recommended that the primary focus of the committee would be issues related to the implementation of its recommendations. However, we are not at the implementation stage. We are asking the committee to examine issues identified by the board as requiring further investigation as well as a number of matters, such as consideration of other legislative instruments that were beyond the scope of the original board of investigation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARTIN: Well, in replying to the ministerial announcement, certainly we welcome the fact that they seem to be moving – I hope I'm right here – to legalizing midwifery. It's long overdue, and I understand that now they will be regulated under the Health Disciplines Act. I remember being the health care critic after I was elected in 1982 and in '83 advocating midwifery at that particular time. So this is a long time later, Mr. Speaker. The studies that we had at that particular time were that it was a good health practice, that it was good for women, good for children, that it was good when people had a choice as to where they had their babies. We were pushing for it back then.

I welcome the first part of the announcement, but we do have some concern when the minister talks about a dialogue. As I say, this dialogue has been going on for many, many, many years, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure how much more dialogue we need before moving in and bringing legislation forward to this House. Now, that's a concern I have because dialogue can be an excuse not to deal with this issue, and I hope that is not the case. I notice that the committee will be reporting to the provincial government by December 31, 1991. Fair enough, but it doesn't tell us what's going to happen, what's the time frame after that in actually moving ahead to legalizing midwifery. I wish the minister could be a little more specific about that.

In the meantime, though, I would hope that there'd be a commitment – I haven't heard it – that until this report comes due, until we have legislation in our House, there'll be no more charges laid. I think that's an important point to make. I expect that might be the case, but I wish the minister would have said that.

So with those concerns we certainly welcome the fact that the Health Disciplines Act is looking at moving forward at least to recognizing a needed service in the province.

head: **Oral Question Period**

2:40 Conflict of Interest Legislation

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. To the Attorney General. After 20 years of Conservative rule in Alberta, public confidence and trust in government frankly has never been lower. The government's response to this situation in Bill 40, its conflict of interest Bill, is frankly inadequate. I talked about public disclosure; I saw the necessity for that yesterday. But let's look at the Bill's cooling-off provision as an example. The provision which prevents cabinet ministers from profiting from their previous positions for six months is not only too short a period of time but also applies to too few people. Mr. Wachowich suggested one year. The federal government has a two-year cooling-off period. My point is that because it applies only to cabinet ministers, it will do nothing to prevent senior govern-

ment employees, like Frank Calder and Margaret Bateman recently, from immediately gaining government contracts from the very people they have just finished serving as employees. My question is this: given that the government had a full year to draft this legislation, can the Attorney General explain why he didn't include in this Bill a cooling-off provision for senior public employees and close political advisers?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, the Conflicts of Interest Act is mirrored on the Wachowich report with the major exception that the hon. leader brings up, a cooling-off period of six months. In regards to the public service, on the introduction and during the announcement we've mentioned that there are provisions in the Act that will amend the Public Service Act such that complementary provisions can be brought into the Public Service Act through regulations, and those will be forthcoming.

MR. MARTIN: Forthcoming is not good enough. It should be part of this Act, Mr. Speaker, as other government have done. It has more weight. That's the point.

Now, flowing from that, I just want to ask the Attorney General. Manitoba has a cooling-off provision of one year that also applies to senior civil servants. The federal government has a cooling-off period of two years, which I already mentioned, for cabinet ministers and one year for senior civil servants. My question to the minister is simply this: doesn't the Attorney General see the potential for abuse when senior government employees in their department can create the demand for private consultants, then turn around and take these consulting jobs themselves and make thousands of dollars?

MR. ROSTAD: The Wachowich report did address elected officials and officials of government in public service. The Conflicts of Interest Act, which could be part of or certainly complementary to the Legislative Assembly Act, deals with elected officials. I can assure the hon. leader that there will be provisions forthcoming quickly that will cover our public service.

MR. MARTIN: You said regulations; it's not the same as having it legislated here in the Legislature. That's the point.

Let me ask a third question on this matter. It's even broader than this. Senior political advisers and government appointees like deputy ministers and heads of Crown corporations are also not dealt with in this Bill. They don't have to disclose. They can do business with the government the day after their position terminates; it's happened, Mr. Speaker. There's no insurance that they will not use their government position for personal gain. My question, again, to the minister: why didn't the minister make this Bill apply to these types of people also?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered that question in the previous response. The Act deals with elected officials, elected members of this Assembly. There will be forthcoming provisions in the Public Service Act that will cover all employees of our government, and I'm sure the hon. leader will be happy with the provisions in that Act.

Health Care Utilization

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Health. The internal government report written by Dr. Howard Platt, which I take it is the one the minister tabled today, makes some serious allegations about patient abuse of the health care system in our province. What is strange, though, is

that these findings are directly contradicted by this government's own – and I have it here, *An Agenda for Action – 1989* report of the Advisory Committee on the Utilization of Medical Services, done by the dean of medicine from the University of Calgary with some other qualified people. This report was done carefully over a two-year period, and this report found that for the most recent fiscal year studied, patient use of the system actually levelled off or decreased in Alberta. Now, my question to the minister is simply this: given that both these reports can't be right, will the minister tell us whether she accepts the findings of the Platt report or the committee on utilization?

MS BETKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is mixing two issues in health, and I will do my best to succinctly describe them. The first is with respect to utilization generally of the health care plan, and I think what we've determined from the Watanabe report is that utilization is not just the number of services, which did dip in the year of the Watanabe report, but rather intensity and cost of those services, which is also part of utilization.

What the report of the provincial medical consultant's office does, which I did table today, is look at the perception I think some people have that there's high abuse within the health care system. What it identified was that .2 percent of users are having a very high frequency of visits, and that is a very different issue. Said another way, 99.8 percent are not having a high level of visits. In fact, the average level of visits to a physician per Albertan per year is two. So I think it's important to define the two levels of the report. Where the medical consultant's report is going now is to the utilization monitoring committee, which was recommended by the Watanabe report, to look at what might be appropriate actions to deal with the problem identified.

MR. MARTIN: Well, that's one of the confusing parts about it, Mr. Speaker. As the minister indicates, there is a monitoring committee set up. It would be my understanding that they were to do exactly the same thing as Dr. Platt has done. When we're trying to save health dollars, I guess my question to the minister is simply this: will the minister explain why it is that she is having her medical adviser study the exact same thing that the monitoring committee has spent several years, much effort, many dollars already carefully monitoring? What's the point of doing this, Mr. Speaker?

MS BETKOWSKI: No. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the monitoring committee put out a list of some of the issues that they felt we should look at in the issue of health care, like high use of lab and diagnostic services, high use of ophthalmology procedures, and the utilization monitoring committee is working through those issues. What the report of the medical consultant is coming to a conclusion on, and as the department certainly recommended, is that it's not a matter of these particular people in this .2 percent of the population misusing the health care system; rather the question is: given that they clearly have a health need, as the report identifies, is the current model of fee-for-service physician visits the best way to deal with that need? In fact, the report concludes that there is a better way to deal with the health needs of those people than the current system that we have. I think it's a very important role for the Ministry of Health to be looking at how we provide access to health services in order to make Albertans healthier, and I don't apologize for it for one moment.

2:50

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking the minister to apologize. I'm talking about replication of services that cost a lot of money, and that's maybe what she should apologize for.

Let's get into some of the recommendations, because the minister alluded to them. I would point out that this study was over a relatively short period of time, three months, but I think it has some serious and questionable recommendations, two specifically that I want to ask the minister about. It suggests taxing high-use patients' benefits as taxable income and also restricting doctors' services currently covered under health care. Now, this is the tip of the iceberg. You pick this group, and then it will go to the rest of Albertans whenever the government decides it needs money. My question to the minister, because this is an important concept: will the minister here today in the Legislature categorically disavow these suggestions and tell Albertans that under no circumstances will she breach the principle of universal medical coverage by adopting any of these regressive and unnecessary proposals?

MS BETKOWSKI: Well, the Leader of the Opposition should stop fueling his questions from irresponsible headlines and start to look at the report that I tabled in this Legislature today. The issue that was identified in this report was: given this issue, what are the things we should do as a health system in order to deal with them? Certainly it outlined what some have recommended we do. Certainly it outlined options of what other jurisdictions in Canada have done, but as it says in itself:

Financial measures are a universal approach which do not address the health needs of the high users but rather the symptoms of their behaviour.

I am pleased to put on the record this government's commitment to the Canada Health Act, to the principles therein. There will be no suggestions, no actions taken which would violate the principles of that Act. I do believe we must look at the high user and look at providing access to the services that that user needs that perhaps aren't included in the current model of health care delivery, and we will continue to do that.

Public Service Code of Ethics

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the hon. Minister of Labour. Last week the Supreme Court of Canada ordered that legislation or codes of conduct that relate to federal civil servants be made much broader, opened up so that civil servants can involve themselves in political parties, collecting money, running for parties, and so on. In our province civil servants are guided by a code of ethics and conduct that was tabled in this Legislature in 1978. There have been no changes to that code of conduct or code of ethics since that time, particularly relating to political involvement. There are many restrictions that I now think are too restrictive compared to that Supreme Court of Canada decision. Will the minister advise this House whether or not she has initiated any discussions with the public service to change the code of ethics and conduct for the civil servants of Alberta?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, the federal government has for many, many years – in fact the hon. member opposite may have encountered this in his door-knocking – had a complete ban for federal civil servants on any activity in political organizations whether at the constituency or riding level or at any policy level or at any fund-raising level, et cetera; in fact, so much so that

I've often had, at least at the doors, a response, "Well, I can't even vote." Well, that is indeed a misunderstanding of the federal government's policy. Recently, as has been mentioned, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that that was a restriction on freedoms under the Charter and it should be opened up.

In contrast, the government of Alberta since 1978 has taken a very broad and lenient point of view. I say "lenient" because it was early recognized that we have citizens working for the government and that they, too, should be able to participate fully in the process that leads to us being Members of this Legislative Assembly. We've had a more, say, pragmatic approach to the matter. I think that over the years that has worked very well, but I'd be interested in hearing the member's specific suggestions, if he has any.

MR. DECORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are specifics. One of the specifics is that the code clearly prohibits senior management officials from collecting money or even being involved in constituency organizations in this province. One of the really glaring disparities between the legislation that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is bringing forward is in the area of the public service being allowed to participate in elections. If you are a civil servant and you wish to run in Alberta, you are given 28 days or less time off. In the enlightened legislation that's coming forward from the minister, you're given three and a half months to involve yourself. I don't think that's fair. Do you?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, we have said for many, many years now that if a civil servant – that is to say, somebody who is employed by the government of Alberta – wishes to run in an election, whether it be provincial or federal or municipal for that matter, then that person is eligible to do so, and that person may do so. But as soon as the person has declared his or her candidacy or the writ drops, whichever is later . . . [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

MS McCOY: If the candidate wishes to announce his or her candidacy much earlier, then that person is given leave of absence; that is to say, that person's job is guaranteed. If the person is successful in running for office, then of course the person takes the office and ceases to be a civil servant. That has worked over the years, and some people have chosen to begin campaigns much, much earlier than the official campaign period is declared. We have examples I think here in the House of former civil servants who have run and have indeed started campaigning far ahead of the official writ period.

MR. DECORE: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not the same job that's guaranteed; it's the same job or a similar job, as designated by the government. That's much different than the municipal provisions that say: the same job. I'm asking the minister. There are disparities, there are differences, and there are unfairnesses. Will the minister agree to review this or, better still, put this over to a standing committee of this House to bring forward recommendations for action by this House?

MS McCOY: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I think we have examples in this very House of people who have been elected, if that is the issue, who were formerly members of the civil service. I think that over time we have maintained a balance and a flexibility in our guidelines and code of ethics which allows appropriate responses to circumstances as they arise. I think it has worked very well. Certainly if the member has difficulties

with any individual case, I would be pleased to discuss it with him.

Hastings Lake

MR. GESELL: Mr. Speaker, my questions relate to an urgent constituency concern. The high water level at Hastings Lake is affecting the structural integrity of some of the homes along the lake. Has the Minister of the Environment determined the cause of this unusual high water level?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the lake level is about 300 millimetres or a foot higher than what the lake has experienced in past years. Basically, this is due to busy beavers, and the county of Strathcona has been working diligently to clear some of the beaver dams and thereby facilitate lowering the lake level. It's further complicated, of course, by very, very wet weather, a lot of precipitation. We'll be working with the residents along the lake to determine whether a long-term solution is required.

MR. GESELL: I would pass on the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

3:00 Disabled Persons Programs

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, people with disabilities and their advocates were amazed when yesterday the Associate Minister of Family and Social Services claimed that individualized funding is based on specific needs and is working well. I know the minister has been lobbied by individuals and organizations concerned about the \$3,000 limit that he has imposed. He's obviously ignoring their concerns, just like he is with the seniors. The reality is that many people need more than \$3,000 a month to live independently in the community, but this government is forcing them to stay in institutions which can be much more expensive. To the associate minister: given that the minister has been told of people who cannot move into the community because of this ceiling, how can the minister ignore these concerns and say that he supports community living?

MR. BRASSARD: First, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for her interest in this topic, because it's certainly one that is very close to my heart. Back in 1988 I had the privilege of chairing a committee that took a look at persons with disabilities, and since then I have been very involved in that program in various ways, and now, as a matter of fact, I'm the minister responsible.

Let me say that we have changed the population in one institution alone, Michener Centre, from a population base of 2,400 to, I think, just over a thousand right at the moment. Those people are living in the community with all of the supports necessary. I think the program is working well. If the \$3,000 limit is not sufficient, then we'll have to take a look at that, but up until now it has been working exceptionally well. The ceiling that is presently on that program has been able to accommodate the needs of those persons requiring the services.

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, I know the minister must be aware of people that cannot move into the community because of this ceiling. I know of three people that want to move out of Michener Centre at the moment, but they can't, and they're forced to stay in the institution. I know of four others that are waiting to move out of a group home; they can't because they

need more than the \$3,000. I'm sure the associate minister must be aware of some cases like this. I would ask the minister: given that it is clear that the funding is not based on individual needs, will the minister now admit that the \$3,000 ceiling is unacceptable and change this policy?

MR. BRASSARD: First, Mr. Speaker, I already mentioned yesterday that we had identified over 400 people who wanted to move out of Michener Centre. We're addressing that right at the moment, as a matter of fact; we're reviewing it.

Let me just give you some figures. Right at the moment we are spending \$141 million on assured income for the severely handicapped in this province. We're also spending 72 and a half million dollars on individual services to persons with disabilities. We're spending another 82 and a half million dollars on institutional services. The money is there, Mr. Speaker, because as people move from the institution to the community, the money is following them into that community. That, as well as additional support from the department, is where the money is coming from. I haven't experienced a serious problem yet. We're reviewing the program, and we are going to continue to help people move into the community where it can be proven that the move is going to improve their quality of life. We're committed to that.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon.

Alberta Wildlife Park

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is about the Alberta Wildlife Park. The Alberta government has abdicated its responsibility towards the taxpayers by not filling up to seven or more vacancies for government appointees on the foundation that ran the Wildlife Park. Now, as a result of the foundation's mismanagement and a not too competent minister, we have a blowtorch wielding octogenarian camping out at the park, a collection of animals that are capable of earning money if someone would open the gates and take the fees, and a native band with no money and no cages wanting to lead the animals away. Now, the question is: will the minister agree that the ineptitude of the foundation, with his collusion a large part of it, has lasted long enough and ask the Premier to step in and, with a satisfactory, long-term solution worked out by a government trustee, ensure that the park is opened so people can look at it

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many questions were involved in that, but I'll try to answer a few of the suppositions. The foundation was established under section 9 of the Companies Act . . .

MR. TAYLOR: Never mind the suppositions; how about the question?

MR. SPEAKER: Order. You have a supplemental.

MR. TAYLOR: You went through this a week ago.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. You have a supplementary coming if you keep quiet.

DR. WEST: The foundation was established, as I was saying, under section 9 of the Companies Act in 1985. In so setting up the foundation, the government could recommend some names

but by no means appoint them. The people that join the foundation are from the public and are voted on at a board of directors meeting. The foundation has been working diligently to find a solution after the government had given them a direction that future government support would be diminished.

I just might say that any supposition about the Enoch band I think the hon. member should take up with the band themselves, because that negotiation is going on between the foundation and the band.

You would have to repeat the rest of the question. I think there were several questions in there, and I have addressed the first two.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, the band has quite clearly announced that they don't have any money. It's very simple. They're asking the minister, the government, and the taxpayers for money.

Now, would the minister go this far: will he guarantee or promise this House that he will not allow the foundation to dismiss any of the key employees of the Wildlife Park, thereby jeopardizing the health of those animals?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I would in no way direct the operation of the Alberta Wildlife Park, which is under the foundation. I would in no way take on that management position, because the wildlife foundation has been doing that diligently and to the best of their ability under the circumstances.

One other thing I would like to say. I would advise the member to consult with the Enoch band. To make a supposition on their financial ability to establish this park I think is totally out of line in this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

Education Funding

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you. My question is to the hon. Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, over and over again I've brought forward to this Assembly the issues of poverty, unemployment, welfare, and regional disparities in my constituency.

AN HON. MEMBER: Mike, they don't listen.

MR. CARDINAL: You just listen.

An example of this is the Lac La Biche school division. Their present structure only allows them to spend \$5,000 per capita, per student, in their school system while other jurisdictions can spend over \$10,000. Mr. Speaker, this is creating numerous problems for my constituents, to the point where they are laying off staff and cutting valuable programs for the students. While we all realize that the alternative is to build up a strong assessment base for a constituency – that's one ideal way to go – it's not possible at all times.

I see a light at the end of the tunnel these days: I see the Leader of the Official Opposition is now supporting the free enterprise concept as of today. I read that in *the Journal*, and I really appreciate that. After fighting him for two years here, fighting my industry, he is now supporting free enterprise like Al-Pac. Thank you, Leader of the Official Opposition.

My question to the hon. minister is: will the minister give assurance to this Assembly that he will do whatever he can to assist this issue with the Lac La Biche school division?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, what my hon. colleague does so eloquently is raise the issue of education funding and the uneven

distribution of wealth across this province upon which school boards rely for more than 40 percent of the costs of delivering education locally. My hon. colleague has been very supportive of our efforts to find a solution to the problem of fiscal inequities across the province. I look at the Lac La Biche school division and see that last year they taxed local taxpayers nearly 12.9 mills, almost 2 mills over the provincial average. They raised \$80 per mill per student compared to a provincial average of \$174. Now, that's just plain unfair, and we've got to find a solution that helps boards like the Lac La Biche school division find a fairer source of funding of education.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that we have been supportive. In the last three school years the provincial government has provided \$350,000 in contingency funding. We will continue to be supportive of the Lac La Biche school division in their efforts to deliver quality education in their school district.

3:10

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, my supplemental is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Because this is a matter that involves the local assessment base and local taxes, could the minister give some assurance to this Assembly that he will do whatever he can through the ID No. 18 council and possibly through his department to assist the school division to resolve some of the problems they're faced with?

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Speaker, I want to give the assurance to the hon. member with regards to his numerous representations on this matter that we're prepared to help in any way we can in terms of trying to accommodate the needs of the Lac La Biche school division. One of the programs that improvement district 18 south has is with regards to a reserve fund. In this reserve fund there's a number of dollars, a major sum of money, some \$1 billion, that were put aside when the government of Alberta made the municipal debt retirement program available to all municipalities in the province. This improvement district does have some of that money in the reserve. Up to the present time the school division has not been able to access it, but I would think further discussions should be held with regards to that matter, and I'm sure the hon. member would support that.

Pulp Mills Impact on Health

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, environmental issues are increasingly seen by the public as health issues. It's as if we now recognize that we're a part of the environment and not separate from it. But there's a very important health aspect of government licensing of six major pulp projects in Alberta, and I'm referring to bronchitis, asthma, and cancer among people who work inside those pulp mills. This issue has fallen between the cracks. The Health ministry is working on a long-term strategy. Environment excludes the issue from environmental impact assessments. Occupational Health and Safety: well, they'll get back to us if somebody writes a letter or something. I would like to ask the Minister of the Environment why the crucial matter of the health and mortality of workers in pulp mills is excluded from the environmental impact assessment process in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: There are numerous ministries and departments within government to address this particular issue. There is, as you pointed out, the department of Occupational Health and Safety; there is the Department of Health. Very basically, the Department of the Environment's mandate is to determine the environmental impacts of projects on land, air, and water, and

there are other departments, as I pointed out, Mr. Speaker, to address the situation of the health and safety of the worker.

MR. McINNIS: So Environment looks at land, air, and water but not people? I think we're sort of getting to the nub of the matter. I mean, the Worker's Compensation Board has identified one cancer case at Weldwood which they've pegged to chemical exposure in the mill. There are studies around the world recognizing this problem but not in Alberta; there are no Alberta studies. In view of the burden of evidence I'd like to ask the Minister of Health if she's reconsidering the request from the Public Health Association of Alberta to do baseline health studies among affected populations so that at least we'll have some basis for comparison in years to come.

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, we are doing a baseline study with the involvement of public health. I'll certainly review the Blues and ensure that I've got the intent of the hon. member's question. Certainly the purpose of the long-term strategy is to find the link between environment and health, which, despite the hon. member's view that it has, in fact hasn't been scientifically discovered. Trying to find the baseline health studies, which we are now participating in, and the impact of external sources on health is one that hasn't been clearly identified and linked, including the experts we've consulted not only in Alberta but beyond Alberta to find that link. What we're trying to say with a long-term strategy is: what is the link between environment and health, and what can we do to ensure that we're catching it?

I will review the Blues to make sure I've caught the hon. member's question.

Decentralization

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal caucus has raised the need for a master plan for decentralization a number of times to no avail. Even a question on the Order Paper on this very subject is rejected by this wheelbarrow government. Yesterday the Minister of Agriculture announced no relocations this year, but they will go ahead next year. I am truly hoping, but I'm not overly optimistic, that the government has learned from the ill-conceived lottery move to Stettler, announced by the Member for Barrhead. To the Minister of Agriculture: will the minister inform this House as to the results of any cost analyses or studies done by his department or any government department when it comes to relocation or decentralization of provincial employees?

MR. MITCHELL: Did you think about it, Ernie, or did you just do it?

MR. TAYLOR: Ask Olympia & York; they've got all the answers.

MR. ISLEY: Do you want to hear an answer, or do you want to keep talking? [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in the House about a week ago, as soon as we complete our decentralization plan, the staff in Alberta Agriculture will be the first ones to know the details. As the hon. member should know, until we complete the plan and know exactly (a) the numbers that we're talking about and (b) the communities they'll be moving to, it's pretty difficult to do a cost analysis of it. We said from the beginning that we're attempting to decentralize in a cost-effective way, and that is still our intent.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm happy to hear that the minister has at least done some type of plan, although he hasn't admitted to that in the past, but he still has not done that cost analysis that should be done. The Premier and this government will talk about family unity. For the sake of family unity, to the minister responsible for Agriculture: will he commit to this House, for the sake of the government employees and their families, that he will table in this House any plans that are undertaken or completed, any cost analysis on decentralization before any further decentralization occurs?

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, it is exactly because of our concern about family unity and the impact on family that we reached the decision last week that there would probably be no decentralization occurring in the summer of 1991. We made the commitment to the staff that we wanted to develop a total plan and share it with them all at the same time, not go on a piecemeal basis, and because our time line slipped a bit, the shell of decentralization we were aiming for in '91 was too quick. So it's exactly because of the concern for family life-style, children and the impact on their education that we've talked of August timings on decentralization.

The hon. member didn't listen to my first answer. I said that until you have a plan and know the number of people you're working with and the locations you're taking them to, you cannot put a cost analysis on it. When we have that plan completed, we will be doing a cost analysis and see how cost effective it will be.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Glenmore.

Kananaskis Development

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of Calgarians have expressed a concern regarding development in Kananaskis Country. It appears that there are a number of major proposals for Kananaskis Country, and the major concern expressed is the public participation process. In most jurisdictions there is a continual process for applications to have open public hearings. I was wondering if the Minister of Recreation and Parks could explain the process of public participation in regards to development in Kananaskis Country?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it's a well-directed question with all the concerns that have come forward recently. I would say that the public process started back in 1985. There were public hearings brought forward on Kananaskis Country, and the Kananaskis integrated resource management plan and policy was put into place. Now, after those hearings high recreational and other uses in Kananaskis Country were identified.

3:20

In saying that, the proponents that bring proposals forward – and we don't go out seeking these proposals; they come before the government – are directed to what we call the Kananaskis Country Interdepartmental Committee, which is made up of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, Recreation and Parks, Transportation, Environment department, Public Works, Supply and Services, and Tourism. They then set out a set of guidelines that must be met as well as calling for public hearings. For example, the Kan-Alta and heli-ski proposals that have been brought forward have both been directed to a public hearing process. Kan-Alta's is over at the present time and was advertised well in the area, and I have no information as to where the heli-ski proposal is. It is also sent to the Kananaskis Country

Citizens' Advisory Committee for review, and after that, depending on what the Department of the Environment does – and this is a new one – it could be directed to the Natural Resources Conservation Board, where there is public review at that point.

That's just the beginning, and I give full credit to the proponents that come forward, because the time, money, and effort that goes into these proposals is extravagant and long standing. To this date all of the proposals that are there are not even up to making an application for building permits, which then come through Kananaskis Country and this department.

Thank you.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, it seems like the public has not been hearing about these advertisements. Has the government basically deviated from this process, since no one seems to be aware of these public hearings?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, after the length of the first part of the question that I answered, I would say unequivocally, no, we have not deviated from the process I have outlined.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

Drug Testing of Workers

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to raise with the Minister of Labour the issue of mandatory drug testing by employers of workers at the worksite. With drug testing there is no guarantee of the workers' rights and freedoms. The drug test itself can be wildly inaccurate, and the fact that there are no guidelines in the labour codes or the human rights codes leaves the whole issue open to great managerial abuse of authority. In fact, a constituent of mine working for a U.S.-owned firm in Leduc where public safety was not an issue was recently punished for not submitting to a drug test at his worksite. Will the Minister of Labour please tell the Assembly here today what legislative solution she has for protecting the rights of workers against mandatory drug testing, mindful also of the needs to ensure public safety?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the Human Rights Commission has taken a good look at this issue, and I certainly would encourage the individual the hon. member has mentioned to inquire at the Human Rights Commission. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has written quite an extended policy on this issue, and I believe it is one that has been accepted by ours here in Alberta as well.

REV. ROBERTS: Well, surprise, surprise, Mr. Speaker. We did contact the Human Rights Commission already and were told by Mr. Fraser: well, we don't have a policy on it; ask the minister. So here today I'd like to reiterate the fact that because these drug tests have a high error rate – for instance, you can test positive today if you took Dristan for a cold on the weekend – and the whole approach serves to undermine union-supported education and assistance programs, which is a much healthier way to approach this difficult issue, will the minister at least commit to work with the Federation of Labour, the Building Trades Council, and the folks at the Human Rights Commission to develop a fair and coherent legislative policy on drug testing and stop this practice where employers can dismiss or refuse to hire workers who do not submit to the drug tests?

MS McCOY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed to hear that our Human Rights Commission has not dealt with it, and that is something I will take up with them at the first opportunity I have.

Certainly everyone, I think, does recognize that where it may be appropriate for some jobs and in some circumstances and with certain protections for individual rights to have drug testing for workplace issues, one can imagine, at least, that there are many ways in which that approach could be abused. It is definitely something that needs to be worked out in consultation with employees and, if they are unionized, then through their union representatives. I think appropriately it is done from worksite to worksite, because circumstances do vary from place to place, and what may be appropriate in one case is not in the other. So I certainly support the suggestion to develop policies that are appropriate across the province and involving employees themselves in the development of those policies.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Aids to Daily Living Program

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government keeps insisting that the changes to the Aids to Daily Living program were done to promote fairness and equity among clients. These clients are often the most vulnerable of our citizens, and it's apparent to me that what this Conservative government means by fairness and equity is that everyone suffers equally. I recently have had a plea regarding a young woman who's severely disabled, living in a group home, who requires at least \$2,000 a year for incontinence supplies. In the past this was paid for by ADL, but effective July 1 this woman will now receive only \$400 for these supplies. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Will the minister tell the House how she expects this young woman to accommodate this additional charge of a minimum of \$1,600 a year on AISH?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I would like to look into the very particular circumstances of the issue that the hon. member has raised. As we've said frequently, cost sharing is not something which an individual on these income support plans will have to consider, but I would like to look at the particulars of the individual the member's raising, please.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the point. I want to ask the minister: did the minister have any studies done of actual consequences to real people, real individuals, before these changes were made? These people are already living in very constrained circumstances. Were any real studies done about the consequences?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, our Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities consulted widely throughout the province, and in fact it was one of their strongest recommendations that we look at building our programs not with age and disease discrimination but to consider low-income circumstances regardless of age or illness. That is the way we proceeded. In fact, the average ostomy benefits for an individual under the extended health benefits program was \$650 last year. If the hon. member is telling me that there is an individual out there who's going to be forced to pay \$1,600, I would like to look into the circumstances, having had the consultation of the Premier's council to lead us to these decisions on our program.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places, except for 395.

[Motion carried]

Reforestation

395. Mr. Mitchell asked the government the following question: As at December 31, 1990, what area and percentage of quota cutovers of coniferous forest in the three- to seven-year age class, which Alberta forest service is responsible for reforesting, have not been seeded or planted?

MR. STEWART: Written Question 395 is accepted, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places, except for motions for returns 382, 207, 209, and 238.

[Motion carried]

Pulp Mill Agreements with Government

207. Mr. Mitchell moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing any documents showing agreements between the government and
(1) Daishowa Canada Co. Ltd. and
(2) Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc.
under which the government could be held liable if there were any delay in issuing the company licences to operate under the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's my recommendation that we reject this motion and for a very good reason: quite simply, no such documents exist. I simply can't say any more than that.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I asked this motion for a return for a particular reason: it was to try and settle a suspicion that events surrounding the government's apparent obsession with driving these two projects through the regulatory process raised. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that it became a real puzzle to watch the events of the government's approval process, the approval of the Daishowa project and the Al-Pac project, unfold. What we saw was a very clear-cut and obvious reluctance on the part of Albertans widespread across this province to see these kinds of projects proceed, these two projects in particular, particularly before proper environmental impact assessments were completed.

3:30

For example, it was very clear with respect to the Alberta-Pacific project – especially that people had grave concerns and there were outcries across this province for a proper environmental impact assessment before the decision to proceed with that project would be made. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the first Alberta-Pacific panel did not rule that that project was environmentally acceptable – in fact, they raised more questions than they could answer and they very clearly said

that more research had to be done – despite the fact that Jaakko Pöyry behind closed doors was equally reluctant to say that that project was environmentally acceptable, despite the fact that the scientific panel that followed those two investigations was never even asked to ask the question "is this project environmentally acceptable?" the government proceeded to approve this process.

In spite of all of the evidence to the contrary, in spite of the request of Albertans across this province to delay, put a moratorium on that project until such time as proper environmental impact assessments were done, in spite of the fact that the assessments that were done were not conclusive and certainly never answered the question that this project was environmentally acceptable, this government proceeded in the dark of night two or three days before Christmas, when nobody was looking, to announce this project. So we have to ask ourselves, Mr. Speaker: why would they do that? I'm willing to say that perhaps this government actually had an agreement that they wanted to honour, that in fact they had made some kind of arrangement with Daishowa, whether in writing or verbally, tacitly or explicitly, that said: "Go ahead and start doing your planning; start clearing the land; start doing the blueprints and the architectural designs; start doing the industrial designs; start spending money months and months before we have the approval because we're going to guarantee you the approval."

Come time that they have to sign the licence and say, "Go ahead, Al-Pac; go ahead, Daishowa," they've made some pretty profound commitments to these companies to spend money, to begin to create a financial commitment to that project, and all of a sudden the minister finds himself in this awkward position. The people of Alberta don't want these projects, but Daishowa and Al-Pac may well be saying, "Well, Mr. Klein, Mr. Getty, you know, we can take you to court because we've spent an awful lot of money on the strength of your verbal approval."

I remember seeing the Premier on TV saying to a farmer in the Al-Pac area the day that they first announced that project that you're a whiner if you don't like this project. If he's willing to say that in public, I wonder what he said in private to Al-Pac. He probably said to Al-Pac: "Don't you worry, you guys. You go and you begin to build these projects; you proceed. Don't worry about regulatory approval. We've got that all under control, and we're going to guarantee that those projects are going to go ahead." Time comes, and there is no reversing it. Mr. Speaker, all we want to see is what kind of documentation Mr. Klein or the Premier signed to these companies to say, "Hey, here's the guarantee; take us to court if we don't deliver." If the minister is saying that he doesn't have documents, then I guess we have to accept that he doesn't have documents, but I would love to have been in those rooms when those discussions were proceeding to see what kind of verbal commitments were made to those companies.

Perhaps the minister, smiling smugly as he is right now because he knows he doesn't have to release the document, could stand up and tell us did he or did he not make a verbal commitment, and try and convince us so that we would believe that in fact he didn't.

MR. KLEIN: No, I didn't. Trust me.

MR. MITCHELL: I trusted that you wouldn't build the Al-Pac project, Ralph. I thought you'd listen.

[Motion lost]

Oldman River Dam

209. Mr. Mitchell moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a detailed breakdown of government expenditure on the Oldman River dam since the initiation of the project to March 1, 1991.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, Motion for a Return 209 is very similar to Motion for a Return 212 of 1990, which was defeated in the House on June 5, 1990. At that time I indicated to the Assembly, and I've also indicated subsequently as well during the estimates associated with the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services and the Capital Fund estimates, that at the conclusion of the construction of the Oldman River dam when we had all of the accounting in, I would make available all the required information with respect to every expenditure level with respect to the Oldman River dam. On an interim basis, I have provided specific figures during the estimates of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services dealing with the Capital Fund.

Mr. Speaker, one of the dilemmas that I have with respect to the motion for a return is simply the wording, which allows for a great deal of subjectivity. I pointed this out last year. It's on page 1651 of *Hansard* of 1990: what this word "detailed" means. I want, number one, to say that I'm very, very pleased – I will provide the information at the conclusion of the project. I provided the updates during the estimates, and I'd be very happy to provide any specific kind of information the hon. member or any other hon. member would want if they would be good enough to explain to me exactly what it is that they want. But the motion for a return says, "a detailed breakdown." You're talking about expenditure levels that will arrive, in 1986 dollars, to \$353.3 million. We'll have upwards of over 50 contracts, some of them very, very lengthy, dealing with all kinds of specifics. I've provided so much paper in this Assembly already that unless I can have some greater clarification of this in the interim, it's very difficult for me and, as a result, very difficult, I think, for me to ask the Assembly to accept this motion.

Unfortunately, I have to say that I'm asking the Assembly to reject the motion. I've provided interim information with respect to this. I'm going to give assurances that hopefully by this time next year – this fiscal year is the last year of major expenditures with respect to the Oldman River dam – I'll be making all of this information available. As to where we're at to date, the announced figures for the Oldman River dam are \$353.3 million in 1986-88 dollars. I've already mentioned that before. The project is on schedule. The project is within the budgeted fiscal target that we have for it, and at the conclusion I will provide all that information.

Almost apologetically, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking the Assembly to reject Motion for a Return 209.

MR. McINNIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may not be abundantly clear what the member means by "a detailed breakdown," but there are various ways in which this information can be broken down. It's one thing to say that some \$353 million was spent in 1986 dollars, whatever that may mean in terms of dollars spent, but I would like to put on the record that I've been trying to get, for the last year at least, information from the minister's office dealing with contracts let on the Oldman River dam on a contract-by-contract basis, which is what I mean by "detailed breakdown," such information as:

- (1) the original contract price,

- (2) the date [on which] the contract was let,
- (3) the original projected date of completion,
- (4) the final or most recent agreed price, and
- (5) the actual projected completion date.

It's my understanding that there have been some sizable cost overruns, and maybe that's accounted for in the difference between 1986 dollars and 1990 dollars or 1991 dollars. But sooner or later, and we hope sooner, the government is going to have to provide that information. Just so the minister is not at all confused, there's a motion on the Order Paper of the same vintage as this one which for some strange reason the government has not called to this date.

3:40

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. member. I think a minister is going to keep on going out the door.

MR. MITCHELL: He wants to speak again?

MR. SPEAKER: No; that's all right. Thank you.
Edmonton-Meadowlark, in summation.

MR. MITCHELL: Did somebody else want to speak, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: No; it's a little incident, part of the colourful character of the House.

Please continue, in summation.

MR. MITCHELL: Yes, I certainly appreciate how you could be confused about the minister wanting to continue, because he usually does.

Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed at the response of the minister. I'm willing to admit that "detailed breakdown" certainly raises a number of possible alternatives in determining what that breakdown might be. I would argue against the minister's reluctance to address that issue in two respects. One, he certainly seems on most occasions not to be reticent about clarifying and determining what direction he will take on any given issue or any given question. I'd be happy for him to propose a detailed breakdown that would be most appropriate for him to fulfill. He knows how his accounts are kept. He knows what particular items of expenditure are distinguished and those which are not distinguished, and I would be willing to accept from him a recommendation as to what detailed breakdown would be appropriate.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, that I find it, however, odd that this minister hangs his denial of this request on that particular detail. The fact is that on many occasions ministers in this Legislature – and I'd like to point out and recognize and congratulate the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. Frequently, in dealing with a motion for a return of this nature or a written question, the minister himself or the minister's office will contact a member like myself and say: "Look. We simply can't provide the information in the way that you've specifically requested it. We'd be happy to provide the information this way. Is that okay with you?" Almost without fail – I know I have, and my colleagues will say, "Yes, absolutely; we really appreciate your co-operation." This minister is as close to resolving the definition of "detailed breakdown" as his telephone, as asking me to meet him out back here in the coffee room to discuss the matter. I would be happy, more than happy to be co-operative with him in determining a definition for "detailed breakdown"

that would be convenient to him and his department to provide.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the absence of that, in fact in the minister's clear quickness to jump to the conclusion that he could never define "detailed breakdown," I can only assume and conclude myself that he just doesn't want to have this kind of scrutiny, and there are many people in this province who want that kind of scrutiny. I mean, this is a huge project, and there are any numbers of ways that a government could – I'm not going to use the word "hide" – account for this kind of project in a way that distracts or disperses the apparent expenditures.

For example, I wonder how much expenditure goes to staff in the Department of the Environment, who aren't supposed to have anything to do with dams any longer yet have a great deal to do with this project. I wonder how many engineers spend part or all or some of their time dealing with that project, whether now or a year from now or a year ago or two years ago. I wonder if that kind of information has been accounted for in the creation of that dam. I wonder how many people from the Agriculture department? How many people from the culture department? How many people from any other number of departments have had a role in that dam, whose salaries, whose office space, whose support expenses aren't included in that dam? Yet some of those people, some of those positions wouldn't be required if we didn't have this huge project.

Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that it is very important that we are able to scrutinize the minister's assessment of \$350 million, which seems low, in ways such as where we say: what is the comprehensive costing of this project? What is the real cost into this project? Not the costing that the minister in some final, manipulated way wants us to see, but the real costing down to the nitty-gritty so we can see in fact what this dam does cost the people of Alberta, and then we can assess that cost against whatever presumed benefit it may be that that dam will provide. Without this kind of information, we simply can't do it, and without being able to do that, the people of Alberta don't know exactly what they've got, and they deserve to know that.

I'm disappointed, Mr. Speaker, and I would urge the members of this House not to listen to that minister but in fact to do the right thing and vote for this motion for a return.

[Motion lost]

Hazardous Waste Disposal

238. Mr. McInnis moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all evaluation reports and other assessments of the merits of the Von Roll rocking kiln design employed by the Swan Hills special waste treatment facility.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I propose to reject this motion. This information is considered to be proprietary and market sensitive. If it were to be released as public information, it could be injurious to the business status of or it could cause potential damage to the company that designed this particular kiln.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, this is . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Now the Chair will recognize you. There seemed to be some confusion as to whether or not the member was summing up.

All right; Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't think you have to editorialize like that, Mr. Speaker. I'm disappointed that you would. Thank you for recognizing me, however.

Mr. Speaker . . .

Speaker's Ruling Criticizing the Speaker

MR. SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. What did you say? Let's have a rerun, please, before that.

MR. MITCHELL: I said, Mr. Speaker: you don't have to be pointing out that there's some confusion in a way that is, I find, somewhat sarcastic and unnecessary. I noticed . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Take your place, hon. member. There was no need for any of that. What's your problem?

MR. DECORE: What's yours?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. MITCHELL: You asked me to answer. I don't see what your problem is.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Take your place.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you asked me . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Take your place.

MR. MITCHELL: Ask me nicely: will you please take your place?

MR. SPEAKER: Take your place. Hon. member, the way it works here, just in case you've forgotten, is that when the Chair stands, you take your place. I'd be only too willing to engage in some conversation with you, but if you're going to keep jumping up and down and yelping, that doesn't help your position much.

The other part is that your comments were totally uncalled for. There was indeed confusion here. Are you paying attention here or are you getting it from over there?

MR. MITCHELL: I can't hear on this speaker. If you'd get it fixed, I'd be able to.

MR. SPEAKER: Would you turn the volume up, please, console operator. It's up at maximum.

The gentleman has been supplied with a hearing jack, but I notice he hasn't bothered to put it in. That, then, becomes your problem.

Now, if you'd like to proceed without any more smart comments, please do so. Failing that, you won't be allowed to continue.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I detected a tone of voice in the way you mentioned "confusion," and if you wanted to ask me not to make smart comments, then would you . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. That's enough. [interjection] Thank you.

Edmonton-Jasper Place, in conclusion.

MR. DECORE: Just be fair; just be fair.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Edmonton-Jasper Place.

3:50

Debate Continued

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely disappointed in the response of the Minister of the Environment to Motion for a Return 238. The Von Roll rocking kiln design was purchased by Alberta Environment and their agents at the time for the Special Waste Management Corporation as the primary technology for incineration of hazardous waste in the special waste treatment facility. That equipment has never worked for its designed purpose. It is widely speculated – in fact, it's been reported by news media and the public – that people in the Department of the Environment recommended strongly against the installation of this technology because of its unproven nature in a facility of the scale and complexity that was built at the time.

Now, the record speaks for itself in terms of the operation of that facility. It has not been able to incinerate contaminated solid waste. Incineration of liquid waste, chiefly PCB oil from transformers, has not been a difficult problem for this technology or any technology. You simply get it hot enough, put it in a spray nozzle, and it burns. But the solid waste material, which has to be exposed on every angle and aspect to a flame, needs some agitation, and this rocking kiln design from a Swiss firm, which was manufactured in the city of Calgary, has never functioned for the designed purpose.

Well, what's the relevance of that? Not simply to recanvass ancient history, although the history is not really that ancient. We're talking five or six years from when this decision was made. The significance is that we have a Bill before the Assembly today, Bill 32, dealing with the Special Waste Management Corporation, which presumes and presupposes a tripling of the capacity of that facility. Now, the facility will be installing a new technology; the Von Roll rocking kilns are not going to be used anymore. It seems that Alberta Environment and the corporation and perhaps the joint venture partner have all learned their lesson. But we need to know, I think, what type of a process is gone through in government before technology of this sort is chosen. I believe that a major portion of the \$70 million or so that has been lost on the operating side on this plant to date is directly attributable to the decision that was made by somebody in government to employ this particular technology.

Where have we gone from there? The Minister of the Environment suggests that release of this information would be injurious. Well, I think it might be injurious to the people who made the decision to employ this particular technology, but beyond that I don't really think that a case can be made for withholding information, because I think in addition to understanding who made the errors in the first place, we need some reasonable assurance that similar errors are not going to be made in the future, that systems are in place to ensure that technology employed in a facility like this is indeed market ready, is indeed able to be employed, and will perform at least to its design capacity. I say again that the Von Roll technology has in no way, shape, or form met its design capability. It's cost the taxpayers millions upon millions. I think a major portion of the \$70 million-odd in losses to date is attributable to a poor choice in technology.

I don't think it's good enough to say that we're going to sweep this whole affair under the carpet, we're going to put all of the documentation dealing with the Von Roll decision in an ultrasecret category where it may not be seen by the public,

because the person who fails to learn from mistakes of the past is condemned to repeat them.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place has moved Motion for a Return . . . Excuse me, gentlemen and folks. Newspapers aren't allowed in the Assembly, hon. minister.

MR. MAIN: It's not a newspaper.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

[Motion lost]

School Year Extension

382. Mrs. Gagnon moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies prepared by, for, or submitted to government, from 1986 to April 30, 1991, concerning the concept of year-round schooling.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I believe that the hon. member is interested in seeking some information that has been generated about the interesting concept of year-round schooling. I support her efforts to find that information out. I would propose an amendment to her motion by striking out the words, "for, or submitted to" after the words, "copies of all studies prepared by," such that the motion would read:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies prepared by government, from 1986 to April 30, 1991, concerning the concept of year-round schooling.

I would recommend members accept the motion as amended.

MR. SPEAKER: Speaking to the amendment? Is there a call for the question with regard to the amendment?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

MR. SPEAKER: Now, the motion as amended, in conclusion, Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The concept of year-round schooling is most interesting and fascinating. I visited such a school in Nevada, I believe, four years ago and was quite struck with the unique approach. It seemed to be successful there and I believe is something that is worthy of pursuit in Alberta, at least with a pilot project.

The problem is that there is a lot of talk about it – some school boards are giving it very serious consideration – however, there does not seem to be enough information, and thus my motion. Year-round schooling may very well be more suited to the 1990s and the life-styles that people in Alberta have in the 1990s. Year-round schooling may also be educationally sound. These are things that have to be known by school boards and by parents before they make the decision to try even a pilot project. It might also be that year-round schooling is cost effective. However, we must know what the Department of Education has in the way of research, in the way of precedent, before those decisions can be made. I really believe that the financial implications especially must be well known, because while it seems that we will have a better use of resources year-round, capital resources as well as human resources, and that while this would be cost effective, there will also be additional costs.

I think it's most important that these be well known, and I'm very pleased that the minister has agreed to share the information the department has so that members of our public, members of school boards, families, and so on might make good decisions in this regard. I look forward to the information.

Thank you very much.

[Motion as amended carried]

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Beef Grading

217. Moved by Mr. Fischer:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage the federal government to proceed with negotiating a beef grading regime that will allow the Alberta cattle industry to have competitive access to United States markets and enhanced marketing options.

[Debate adjourned June 6: Mr. Fischer speaking]

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Last Thursday I informed members of the Assembly of the problems with Canada's present meat grading system. I mentioned the great value of the cattle industry here to Alberta, and certainly no one can argue its value during the last few years of extremely low grain prices that have forced producers to diversify into cattle. Thank goodness for the strong cattle markets and prices that have kept many of the producers on the farm and in the ag industry and put food on the table for many families during those times.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Many farmers were looking at different ways to market their grain at a better price and looking for cattle to do this. Some went into the cow/calf sector, where they raised new calves each year. Some went into the purebred business, where they specialized in raising top-quality breeding stock. Others went into backgrounding, where they contracted with large feedlots to grow light feeder cattle into heavier weight cattle that were more suitable to put into the feedlots. Still some of the other ones went directly into the feedlot business.

Whichever way they went into this business, there was substantial capital expenditure or investment, and certainly they will market their grain at a better price, but it will take some years for them to recuperate this capital cost. This certainly has been the beginning of another expansion in our cattle industry here in this province. I also mentioned the great importance of accessing new markets to accommodate that expansion.

4:00

The motion is intended to encourage the federal government to continue its good work towards removing the artificial trade barrier which has been so harmful and should not have been in place to begin with. When the grading system was changed – and I believe it was changed in the early '70s or late '60s – it was to accommodate the markets here in Canada and had little regard for our all-important export markets at that time. In fact, Ontario and Quebec, and mostly Quebec, were the big beneficiaries because they were and still are the biggest buyers of Alberta beef. They had bought up to 70 percent of Alberta's

export beef, and of course this artificial trade barrier helped to reduce the competition and, therefore, kept the prices at a more depressed level. Also keeping in mind that Alberta produces around 46 percent of the cattle in Canada, and this figure now is growing again, it has been a political struggle to get the federal government to make these changes to our grading system. The issue itself reminds me just a little bit of the unfairness of the Crow rate and the reluctance of the beneficiaries to make the changes to it as well.

Another reason that has been stalling the change is the reluctance within our total meat industry here in Canada. I know there will be a lot of adjustments and changes that have to be made in the retail outlets; in fact, from the producer right through to the consumer. There's going to have to be a lot of adjustments made in order to accommodate our new grading system, and not everyone is wanting, and it will cost some money for some of the people to make those changes. However, in the long term we have to go with those changes when we know that it's going to be financially the right thing to do. As our market patterns have changed and our new markets open up, the artificial barrier problem has become more prevalent, and continued pressure by the Cattle Commission and the industry have helped put the process in place to make the change to a better grading system.

Japan has in the past few years relaxed some of their import laws on beef, and they are allowing more beef to come into that country now. Certainly because of their vast population and the small areas to produce much of their own beef, they could easily take every animal we could produce if we can once penetrate that market. So Alberta must be in a position to compete for that market. When I think of Australia, they sell a lot of beef to Japan. Their grading system has included a marbling factor in the past, and they easily converted it directly into the Japanese system which their consumers in Japan understand. They now sell Australian beef in the Japanese Seyeu stores over there. They have it graded as Jap 1, Jap 2, Jap 3: the exact system that they have right there and understand. I say that if the Australians can do it, then why can't we?

At the last world's fair in Australia in 1988 Alberta beef was highlighted at the Canadian pavilion. They couldn't keep up at their little restaurant there; there was a tremendous amount of Japanese and even Australian customers that just loved our delicious Alberta beef. In fact, they had to fly in more beef over there so they could accommodate the demand.

This motion is particularly timely given that there has been a ministerial change at the federal level. Mr. Mazankowski, as you know, has moved to the Ministry of Finance, and I think that it was a great move for our country. It will certainly give him the clout at the federal level to get our country more in line with our province and hopefully get our national budget on track. With our new minister just beginning to take over these duties, Motion 217 should be passed by this Legislature, as it will re-emphasize to our federal counterparts that this matter is an important one to us here in Alberta and that resolving these issues is a priority of this government.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make note that I'm sure every Albertan here would like to share a delicious filet steak or some prime ribs or some juicy stew and onions and that kind of thing, with many people.

MR. EVANS: And a nice bottle of wine.

MR. FISCHER: Yes, we'd have a nice bottle of wine along with it, red wine with our beef. We would share this with many

people of the world. I would like to encourage our members here to support Motion 217 so this can be possible.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly agree with the intent of Motion 217 up to a point. However, there are a few things that the hon. member has alluded to that I would somewhat question. For example, the last day that this was debated, he didn't know why Alberta beef was quite as good as it is. I would suggest to him that it is a combination of genetics, of the long grass, and of the finishing techniques, something that Alberta cattle producers have been working on for a lot of years.

I take exception to the feeling he seems to imply, that if we change our grading system, all of a sudden the market for finished Alberta beef is going to just jump right up at us. He alluded to the Japanese system, and I don't think it's any great difficulty to correlate our grading system with the Japanese requirement if it means a method of determining the degree of marbling and so on. What the hon. member overlooked was the fact that the Japanese have something that they want, and that's called roughly a 30-day shelf life for finished beef. The Australians have promised this, and they're consequently getting an inside track on the market to a degree. I think Alberta producers have rightly not gone out on a limb until they can assure that they can deliver what they're promising, and I would say that as research goes on and the systems of processing improve, with a little bit of aggressive marketing we should be able to crack the Japanese market to a little bit greater extent.

The dilemma, if you will, or the problem that's facing Alberta beef producers, and is getting worse, as the member correctly identified, is the number of live cattle going across into the U.S. and then being slaughtered and we get the finished products sent back. The grading system will not change this. This has come about through some very, very shoddy management in the red meat industry by this particular government. Over the past 20 years Edmonton, for example, has shrunk from one of the major red meat processing centres of North America, second only to Toronto and Chicago a few short years ago, to not even being on the map for processing red meat. I think if you look down the list and see what's happening with the plants being pulled out of Calgary and Lethbridge, we have to look at a little bit more than just changing the grading system.

I would certainly concur with the member that if our grading system creates problems, we should review it, but I would also like to caution the approach that we take. If we have a good, accurate, high standard that we're trying to maintain, perhaps we should be pushing for other people to meet our methods. If we haven't got a good grading system, then certainly we should review it and look at change. How a ministerial change of an ineffective federal Minister of Agriculture becoming an ineffective Minister of Finance is going to help this particular grading system of beef is certainly beyond me, but the member seems to feel that that change will do some good. I'd like him to clarify how we're going to get any more mileage out of the cousins that don't co-operate.

4:10

Although, like I indicated in the beginning, I do concur with the original intent of this particular motion, I think it should be expanded to some degree, expanded somewhat to go beyond just making it a rubber stamp of the American system, to go beyond

just changing a grading system. Certainly we should be urging the government to have a good, long, hard look at the red meat industry in Alberta and look to see how we can improve our export position with respect to processed meat. We should go beyond the business of just the beef industry, because certainly we are facing the same problems in the hog industry, where the number of live hogs going out of Alberta is continually increasing. We're facing a problem where Alberta producers, the guys right on the front line, are being looked upon as the people who are going to absorb the cost of freight by the efforts of both hog and cattle producers to move the live animals closer to the concentrated markets. So the problem goes far beyond the grading system. If that is one of the quirks in it, by all means we should be looking at it, but I would like to see this motion expanded to urge the government to have a good look at making a viable red meat processing industry once again a part of Alberta's value-added economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I should make a few comments in support of Motion 217, because as has been mentioned before, of course, the Alberta beef industry and cattle industry – it's probably one of the best value-added products that we produce. As has also been mentioned once before, and I'd like to elaborate on it a little bit, as the grain markets continue to decline around the world because of some high-cost subsidies put in place by the European Common Market and the American government to access that market and to compete with it, it is forcing more people to look at the livestock industry, not just the beef industry but the pork industry, as a viable alternative. I think that's healthy, Mr. Speaker, but I think we have to look at the whole thing. As the hon. member mentioned before, maybe the grading system isn't the be-all and end-all, but certainly it's a start in the right direction to try and access some of these markets.

I was fortunate enough several years ago to be part of a trade mission to Japan, so I had a little bit of a firsthand look at what they want to buy over there. Certainly our grading system is probably one of the best in the world, if not the best for certain things. The Japanese and the Pacific Rim countries have adopted a system similar to the United States' system of grading, where they like to have a certain amount of marbling. It's a market that we have to get into if we're going to compete on the world stage. When I was over there, the Kobe beef was selling at around \$47 a pound, so you can understand the impact that this would have on our market here and for our cattlemen if we can continue to access that market on an increased level. While the Australians have sold a lot and accessed this market to a large degree, they've put a lot of manufacturing beef in there, which is of a different quality. It's only recently that they're starting to move some of their fat cattle in there and complying with the marbling regulations.

I'd just like to speak for a moment on the 30-day shelf life type of thing. There have been some experiments and research carried on for probably the last 15 years on this aspect of it and different ways and methods of cryo-vacking any beef. They can now keep it for long periods of time by sucking the air out of it and sealing it tightly in plastic. There are many, many different ways of doing this to achieve this 30-day life.

The Japanese and the Pacific Rim markets are probably one of the main reasons that we need some kind of a grading system

that would qualify our meat into that market. As it is right now, when our meat goes in there, it's specially fed, it's specially cut, and it's specially boxed for that market. We have the same thing that applies in the United States. When we ship meat down there, it goes in on a no-roll basis, and it's very hard to find a category under their grading system that ours fits. But I have to add to that and be really positive about our beef grading system here: it's one of the most widely accepted tastes of meat and type of grading. It's just the numbers that don't fit with the American grades. I would have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it would be a relatively simple change that may take quite some time to achieve, knowing how long it takes to change the grading system, but it could have some far-reaching effects in Alberta.

We've had some rationalization in our meat packing industry in Alberta. There will probably be more rationalization. If this government hadn't got involved over the last few years in trying to promote this rationalization, I think you would find that we wouldn't have had any packing plants left in Alberta let alone in northern Alberta. They would have all gone south of the border. There's a lot of beef and a lot of hog production that's moving that way now. They've been able to rationalize their industry in the United States, for some very evident reasons, a lot quicker and a lot easier than we've been able to do here in Canada. They've had lower interest rates, and that has made rationalization cheaper. There are many, many plants in the United States that one plant would kill the whole capacity in Alberta in one day. They can handle that. It's so much bigger and stronger than ours. Their lower interest rates and their lower wages and a few other things impact on that. They don't have nontariff barriers to work in our favour; they work in their favour. We're finding that more and more as we try and move beef into the United States under the free trade agreement; we find that these are nontariff barriers. The inspectors will just come up with some reason for it not fitting their grade, and turn the beef back. When they do that, then the next 15 loads from that plant are automatically inspected.

Motion 217, of course, would just encourage the federal government to continue its efforts, and this is in line with the policy expressed by the Alberta Cattle Commission, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, and most farm organizations in Alberta. One of the things that we have been involved in, as I mentioned before, was the rationalization in Alberta. It was said that the packing industry has moved out and we no longer have it. I think the packing industry will stay in Alberta, and it will probably increase its capability of handling beef and pork, for that matter, because the product is grown here and we have to compete on a world market. We have to get our grading in line or else somebody else has to come to our grades to fit the categories so we can fit these markets. When you're dealing on a market that's basically graded according to the United States grades and according to the Japanese grades – these are our big customers – it's up to us, I think, to swing a little bit in some way to address that particular situation.

We presently, Mr. Speaker, have the strongest economy in North America in the province of Alberta, and certainly if we could get more value-added spin-off from the beef industry and if we can package beef here and box it with the marbling in it to move it into the Japanese and Pacific Rim countries, the spin-off from that would be fantastic. It may not happen overnight, but it would help our total economy and continue to make Alberta the place to be in Canada and in North America. We've seen that our economy in Alberta has moved up as other parts of Canada's have gone down. I think we need to promote that, and this is one small way we can continue to do that: get the

federal government to move this grading system into an improved situation and bring down these trade barriers.

4:20

The federal government must, however, work towards ensuring that free trade is conducted as per the free trade agreement, and this Motion 217 would just have the Alberta Legislature encourage and help the federal government to create a grading regime that would allow the cattle industry to have a little more competitive access. We've been very fortunate in the cattle industry in that we have had basically a free trade system with the United States for a number of years, and we would just like to place some emphasis on that and come up with a little better grading system that meets the standards.

Former federal Minister of Agriculture Don Mazankowski – his constituency, of course, as you know, overlaps that of the motion's sponsor – has given verbal support to this type of grading overhaul, and hopefully now that he is in a different position, maybe it will help. I'm sure the hon. sponsor of this motion certainly is working on that aspect of it.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Come on, Tom. Page 6.

MR. THURBER: No; I'll go to page 7.

Mr. Speaker, the U.S. has entered a lot of these markets on a very competitive basis, and I think to continue with trying to compete with them without having a grading system that is in conjunction with and stands in the same stead as theirs does, we'd be wasting our time. If we're going to continue with the free trade, and we must continue, there are other things that we have to get in line as the North American continent if we're going to compete on the same basis in the world market. The other thing that probably has to be looked at to help the beef industry is that the same type of beef import law must be imposed in all of North America if we're going to be one trading area that moves into the Pacific Rim countries.

Mr. Speaker, I was going to get into the marbling end of it a little more, on what happens when the Japanese ask for these types of meat. As you're well aware, the Japanese are a predominantly seafood eating nation, and beef was introduced there quite some time ago to try and offset some of the shortages they were coming up with in the seafood area. The people that raise beef in Japan raise a thing called Kobe beef, as I've mentioned before, and the government had set programs up so that these beef producers would make a living with only a very few head of cattle on their place. As their tastes changed and they recognized the value of beef as an alternative food to seafood and rice for protein diets, there was a problem that arose. They couldn't get beef tender enough that was competitive with Kobe beef. The Kobe beef was raised by the Japanese farmers sometimes to the age of eight or nine years old. It was massaged daily, and it was fed rice beer, and a lot of care was taken because they could only have one or two animals on the place.

So when we finally gained some access to the Japanese market, we had to look at what kind of meat they're eating and how they eat it and how they prepare it. If you go into a store in Japan and look at their meat displays, you find that it's sold in very thin slices. It is marketed very well. It's very attractive; it makes you want to eat it just by looking at it. It's very thin, and it has to be very tender because, as you know, eating seafood and products of that nature doesn't require a lot of chewing. It's very tender food, and they were not prepared as a people to change their habits and take on tough food.

McDonald's moved into Japan a few years ago. They had one store in downtown Tokyo, and they couldn't begin to keep up with the people that came by there because they had a tender product. They liked the taste, but they still wanted it made from some kind of marbled beef, and that's where the Australians moved a lot of theirs in, in the manufacturing end of it. Their product that they demand is so tender and so soft and so tasty that it's very seldom any of us have ever tasted that in this country.

Our beef raised in Alberta and raised in western Canada here, the way it's fed with the barley-fed context to it and the grass background to it, has a distinct flavour all of its own. When you move that into the higher, fatter categories to get the marbling effect that we need to fit the American grading system or the Japanese preference system, then you have to go to some overfat type of cattle. That's one of the areas that we've run into problems with in trying to market these cattle. If we couldn't move them into the United States, and it fit their prime and number 1, being overfat, if you didn't have a market at that point in time for those animals, they went in the Canadian market as overfat, so you took a loss on them.

If we could move the grading system to a standard for North America that would fit the offshore markets, Mr. Speaker, we would have a product that could compete better with the Americans' on any of these markets and thus help the total beef industry of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening to this debate with a great deal of interest, partly because I'm aware of the high esteem that Alberta beef is held in in markets throughout our country and areas in the United States. The time when I lived in British Columbia, I often saw Alberta beef advertised. That was a selling point for the product. People in that province know good beef when they find it. But I think the nub of this debate is the question of the two grading systems. Every speaker I've listened to so far has begun by saying that they support Canada's grading system; it's one of the finest in the world; it's much better than the United States'. They want it changed because we're having trouble getting access to American markets for our product. Every single one of them, when they talk about how it should be changed, says it should be changed so it's more like the U.S. system, so that it's better understood by the American consumer.

Now, I think all members in the House should listen to what's being said and what it means in terms of what happens to us when we enter these so-called free trade agreements. I say this especially to those who expressed an interest in entering into a free trade agreement with Mexico, because if you want to talk about changing standards and grading systems so that they correspond to another country's, look at some of the standards that are in place in Mexico. Look at their labour standards, look at their environmental standards, and compare them with ours. A member of the government and I'm sure a member of the Liberal Party would also say: "Well, we're going to raise the Mexico standards. You know, this will be our mission in life, to show the Mexicans the light, the Canadian way, so that they will come on board to our standards." But that clearly is not what's being put forward in this motion. What this motion says is that we want our government to

encourage the federal government to proceed with negotiating a beef grading regime that will allow the Alberta cattle industry to have competitive access to United States markets, and every one of them has said that it should be something that's more like the American system.

So we're not talking in this instance, we're not urging that we try to get the Americans to change to our system. What we're doing is urging that our system be changed to something that's more like the American system, more compatible with their way of doing things, and more compatible with the understanding that their consumer has of the product. So how can you stand here and say: "Well, we're going to work it exactly the opposite way with Mexico. We're going to get them to use our grading system and our standards"? You can't, you know.

I think one of the things that obscures this debate is the use of the term "free trade." The term "free trade" can describe all manner of arrangements. People like it because it begins with "free" and ends with "trade." You put two words that people like together and it sounds like a good idea, but in fact there are all kinds of problems that have to be worked out. For example, under the U.S./Canada free trade agreement or the Mulroney trade deal, as I prefer to call it, Canada does not get out from under the U.S. countervail legislation. So the Americans still have a choice which way they want to go in terms of dealing with us on trade. They can go through their own countervail system, or they can go through the Canada/U.S. disputes resolution branch or through GATT, for that matter. I mean, recently the Americans lost a ruling, I believe dealing with the beer industry, under GATT from a Canadian complaint. They chose to ignore the GATT ruling and said, "Oh, well, we'll deal with this one over here under the Canada/U.S. disputes mechanism agreement."

4:30

So I think instead of talking about free trade, we should be talking about fair trade between countries: what's fair between us. Perhaps what might be fair in this instance would be for the Americans to introduce a more sophisticated and a more comprehensive grading system so that their consumers would have better information about the product that's available in their market, whether it's of U.S. origin or Canadian origin or whatever. That's the kind of thing that we might put under the rubric of fair trade, and I think that term might be better understood in terms of balancing the economic interests of the trading partners, especially when it gets down to the farm gate, which is what we're talking about here, and it gets down to the plant gate where workers are concerned.

It's been suggested – and I think this is a way that we can get around some of these problems – that we try to think through the implications of these agreements for various industries, various sectors, and various groups such as farmers and working people and include terms that are going to relate to their actual ways of doing business. My colleague for Edmonton-Kingsway mentioned the idea of a social charter, which has been built into the European Economic Community integration documents in a way that's designed to prevent companies from seeking low-wage havens within that trading bloc. I think that would be something particularly for the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, who recently jumped up and said that he is personally in favour of a Canada/Mexico free trade agreement without, I think, having addressed the way these things are going to work. I mean, is he going to be here in a few years' time putting forth a motion suggesting that we somehow negotiate with Mexico a way to bring, with the federal government, our standards down

to what would be acceptable and will fly in the Mexican market in the way that the government member has brought forward this motion suggesting that we should barter our grading system in a way so that it's more like the United States'?

So I think this is a concern that's endemic to these so-called free trade agreements. I think we should be thinking about trade in terms of what's fair to the trading partners and what's going to work for our various industries.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I felt moved to speak because I'm a meat eater. I've tried a number of things where I've gone from vegetarian to meat eating, and I've realized that I cannot get away from my cultural roots, which is a meat eating culture. As a meat eater I felt that I must speak about our cattle industry getting a fair shake, "to have competitive access to U.S. markets and enhanced marketing options." Actually, some members forget that Lesser Slave Lake has ag producers like grain and cattle. We do, and they actually concur with the member raising this motion that being able to sell products in foreign markets is important for our province's future and for the future of agriculture in our province and country.

The matters of value-adding and exporting are important for the provincial economy. In 1981-82 the national energy program and the worldwide recession resulted in a 30 percent decline in the annual investment in Alberta between 1981 and 1984. In 1986 the world prices for grain and oil collapsed; provincial natural resource royalties dropped more than 60 percent, substantially affecting the provincial economy. I think whenever we're talking about a number of the issues that we're dealing with in this particular Legislature, we want to make sure that we have some jobs available for people in the communities.

The Conservative government, fortunately, acted to develop a strategy which would protect viable business from failing in this economic climate, to prevent Albertans from losing their jobs, and to create the stability which diversification brings to our province, and I think that's commendable. Numerous indicators show that the strategy is working – much to the chagrin, of course, of our opposition members – not the least of which is our achieving a balanced budget. There have been 107,000 new jobs created in the province over the last five years, and I must say that the provincial GDP is growing at 1.5 percent while the Canadian GDP is estimated to shrink by 1.1 percent in 1991.

Today, of course, the Alberta economy is strong. It's strong and it's getting stronger each year, and I've got to say it's because of the diversification that we have taken on. As my colleague from Drayton Valley said, we are the strongest economy in North America. We've gained the highest investment per capita. Exports are increasing, which is what we're talking about today, Mr. Speaker, and I feel that it's important for us to be able to make opportunities available for our cattle industry to be able to access markets outside of Canada. Between 1971 and 1989 Alberta's family income increased from \$32,578 to \$46,955 in constant '89 dollars.

Two key points of the strategy for long-term economic prosperity were to add value to resource industries and to develop new export markets. These initiatives have been important to the development of our current economic success. They are critical factors for our continued success. Motion 217

is an important motion, as the current beef grading regime puts Albertans – and I must emphasize "Albertans" – at a disadvantage, as it discourages both value-adding and exporting, which is what we're all about to ensure that the cattle industry survives. The province's value-added food processing industry has estimated annual shipments of \$4.5 billion. For each billion dollars of exports, 19,000 jobs are created. The value-adding agricultural component is now slightly in excess of the primary production component. It is the province's largest manufacturing industry, providing jobs for thousands of Albertans, and I feel this is a plus in terms of what we are trying to do as a province.

Should the grading regime be improved? Export shipments will increase and additional jobs will be created, and of course I keep hearing that jobs are important. However, each time we try to bring something forward which will create jobs, we seem to get a negative from the opposition. Free trade has, overall, resulted in a positive net impact on this province and, as a result, on our country. The Canada West Foundation two-year report says that there was a \$4 billion net increase in Canadian exports in manufactured end products in 1990 as compared to 1988, while imports of U.S. end products declined. This means more jobs and economic spin-offs benefiting Albertans and Canadians. The Alberta government is looking to rectify artificial trade barriers with the U.S. to see these numbers increase.

Currently meat packers in pork and beef have been experiencing difficulties with the reinspection system at the U.S. border. The hon. ministers of Agriculture for Alberta and Canada are still pressuring the United States to honour the open-border agreement struck between the federal Minister of Agriculture and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. As it does not look like the U.S. will move on their open-border agreement, the government of Alberta, the Alberta Cattle Commission, and the national cattle commission have been pressing the U.S. to either harmonize the grading system, find a mutually acceptable equivalency, or to establish a reciprocal grading system whereby Canada could get its beef graded to U.S. grade levels. Either option would improve the current situation. The province, of course, has placed great emphasis on the Asian market, as has the federal government – as has been indicated by my colleagues – which has recently announced the opening of five new foreign offices in Japan. We hope that with this kind of an opening we can create more markets for ourselves in the Japanese area.

However, Motion 217 definitely has addressed the lack of equivalency that has barred us from selling in foreign markets. Motion 217 has also addressed a matter which I'm concerned about, and that of course, as I said, is the U.S. border, and particularly with the inspectors making false statements about our beef. I'm concerned that these inspectors are bad-mouthing our products falsely and that this reflects poorly on our province. Making a 15-year-old statement which keeps getting played over and over again so that people think it's new and original is not right. We have a tremendous international reputation in trade, and it must be maintained.

I agree with the member raising Motion 217 that we must make our federal counterparts aware that rectifying market and trading problems is a priority for this government. We should pass Motion 217 to encourage the federal government to improve the beef grading regime within which our beef producers must operate. A better grading regime is important for the long-term prosperity and the long-term stability of the Alberta economy.

Thank you.

4:40

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Wainwright to conclude debate.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank all of the members for participating in this debate. Your thoughtful input was most certainly appreciated.

The Member for Stony Plain mentioned that there were other barriers besides the grading system. I did mention at the beginning of my speech on Thursday that yes, there are other barriers. There are quite a few other barriers, but this is one barrier that can be fixed and should be fixed, and it's not that difficult to fix it.

He also mentioned, as well as the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, that we should have the U.S. accept our Canadian grading system. Well, I can tell you that in the past about 20 years, give or take, we have been trying to do that. It's not working, and we're not selling our beef the way that we should be selling it. It's not that they don't understand it; they don't want to understand it.

We are at the mercy of the world market. Whether it's Mexico or whether it's the U.S., Japan, or the Pacific Rim, we have to put the stamp on it that they wish. I really believe we should have some system – and maybe it will come when we have our marbling factor put into this – so that our stamp would be on it so that we can relate it directly or convert it directly to every country's grading system so they don't have to change.

Now, I guess I've said it before, and I say it again: we have what we feel is the best grading system in the world. I don't doubt that. We have a great grading system, but it doesn't sell beef. If we want to keep it within Canada and not sell our beef, then I guess we can keep our system. But we in Alberta, because we're expanding and we need those markets – they're vital to us and to the industry – then we've got to adjust. I don't think we can sit back with our heads in the sand for another 20 years and say, "We've got the best grading system, and you people have to adjust to it." It just hasn't worked, and I don't know how long we should try making it work.

I would just like to say that for the benefit of the cattle industry and the many dollars that come into this province because of it, I would ask all our members to support Motion 217.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Parliamentary Reform

218. Moved by Mr. Decore:

Be it resolved that a select special committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to consider reforms relating to the legislative process, including but not limited to the provision of

- (1) subcommittees of the Committee of Supply to consider estimates in greater detail, including questioning public servants,
- (2) time limits for responses to written questions and motions for returns,
- (3) greater scope for free votes and a limitation of circumstances in which votes are considered votes of confidence,
- (4) private members' Bills and motions being brought to a vote by the Assembly,

- (5) greater legal access to information, including the need for freedom of information legislation, and
- (6) greater use of legislative committees.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. DECORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have spoken to the issue of reform on previous occasions in this Assembly, so my comments will be shorter than I would otherwise take in the hopes that this matter could reach a vote. [some applause] Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, every MLA in this Assembly has heard his or her constituents talk about the need for parliamentary reform. Schoolchildren just two weeks ago, 150 students at the high school in Leduc, made it clear to me in no uncertain terms that they wanted to see parliamentary reform. Students in Banff, students in Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton have all indicated that they believe there is a very great need for change. You need only go to your own constituencies and hear from your people that they want change, and we need only look at the strength of the Reform Party in this province and in western Canada to realize that a big part of what they advocate is change to the parliamentary system. People's eyes light up when that issue is raised.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has recognized that the rigid party discipline system in our country is in need of change, and they addressed that in their Speech from the Throne and talked about the need for more free votes in our House of Commons. It is, I think, true that Alberta and other provinces in Canada along with our national government have the most rigid party discipline system in the western democratic world. If you look at England, it is not uncommon for the representatives in the House of Commons to be allowed the free vote. It is true in Germany and in France, and it is very true, as we would know from watching the news, watching television, that this certainly is the case in the United States.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

Well, what's wrong? I think that the issues can be categorized fairly simply. People understand what is needed, and I'd like to just quickly go over those points. The first is that people want to see tighter financial control, and for that I think there have to be some changes to the budget process in the province of Alberta. I looked with great interest upon the changes that were made in Ontario to the budget process, which allows during the review of estimates for deputy ministers and other functionaries of the ministry to come forward with the minister to defend programs. As I understand it there, if the defence isn't made to a program, the program isn't funded. That really is zero-based budgeting and the kind of control that people want to see.

I also think that Albertans want to see the fat cut out of the system, and there is a tool that allows for that to be done: the Auditor General having much more power to allow for productivity and efficiency audits. The system is used by many governments now in North America. It's a proven tool.

The next thing that I think is needed in the area of financial control is for all-party committees to look at bottom lines, to look at programs, to do that zero-based analysis that is very much needed.

Another category of change that Albertans want is more information. They want to be able to go to their government, as they're able to go to municipal governments, and say, "I want

the agreement on such and such" or "I want the minutes on such and such" or "I want to see what the story is, the documentation that exists between X and Y or the government and a particular contractor." That's all available, and it is Alberta that is out of step in providing Albertans with that information. There are now only two governments in North America, as I understand it, that refuse to have freedom of information legislation, Prince Edward Island and Alberta. When the Premier talks about *Beauchesne* covering all of the requirements of information, that surely is incorrect; you need only look at the motions for returns and the oral and written questions that aren't answered. Often the simple word "rejected" is given without anything more, even in categories that aren't defined by the Premier as being areas of competitiveness or whatever, the three categories.

MRS. HEWES: National defence.

MR. DECORE: National defence, somehow compromising the government in dealing with other governments. Even when they don't fit those categories, we still get these "rejected," "rejected," "rejected" positions. So more information is very much part of a change that is needed.

Then Albertans want a change from the rigid party discipline system that they see. They want to see MLAs rising from whatever side of the House and adding an amendment that is genuinely and properly regarded and, if it's a good idea, that is accepted as part of the legislation. That's not the case now. The rigid party discipline in Committee of the Whole or in this Assembly simply is not allowing that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I end the discussion by asking that this matter go to a select committee of this Assembly. I haven't listed all of the changes that are needed. I haven't got all of the answers that are required to change the system. I think that will come from the members, who can put forward ideas that are required for change. I'm asking that we start the process by having the committee identify the issues, perhaps talking to Albertans, discussing this with Albertans. We know from the constitutional hearings that Albertans want parliamentary change. Open this up to a discussion with them. Go and see what's happening in other jurisdictions. Make this parliamentary system one that Albertans are proud of and one that they believe in, which is not the case now.

Thank you.

4:50

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MR. EVANS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Motion 218 which is before us today is clearly a smorgasbord of ideas for legislative change. While I admit that some of these ideas are very interesting and that I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry in terms of the principle that parliamentary reform should be carefully, thoroughly, and almost constantly considered given the rapidly changing world in which we find ourselves, I must say that after making a couple of observations, I have some questions about what the member is trying to achieve by this motion.

There are so many recommendations in the motion that it's very difficult to stimulate any kind of meaningful debate. I've noted as well that notwithstanding the six different proposals that we see in front of us, the hon. member has spent very little time dealing with those particular items. I do find it somewhat disconcerting to look at such a comprehensive motion and not

have the detail from the hon. member, firstly, and certainly not have the time in which to debate and deal with these six matters adequately.

Now, I could say, Mr. Speaker, that this approach by the hon. member leads me in some way to doubt the sincerity of his motion, but I won't stoop to that. I've heard on a number of occasions in this House the hon. member talk about the need for parliamentary reform, and I truly believe that he does consider this to be an important matter. I just find it rather peculiar as to the way that he has presented what could be a very important motion or a compilation of motions before us today.

As private members, Mr. Speaker, of course we realize that there are many motions submitted in each session of the Legislature. If a member in opposition or in government has a number of points and submits those points, as in the example today, in six different motions, then the chances of each of them or at least some of them being debated are much, much better. I think it's preferable to spend the time debating in detail some of the matters that have been brought up by the member rather than doing a broadbrushing and just having it put off to another committee or whatever to deal with the specifics.

Now, I appreciate that having these six proposals in one motion provides an opportunity for the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry to be on the record as having officially spoken to all of them, but what can be achieved if we don't have the opportunity due to time constraints to thoroughly review each of these ideas separately? Isn't it somewhat ironic, Mr. Speaker, that one of the proposals in Motion 218 attempts to make private member's hour more meaningful and more influential? Judging by the way this motion is worded and the complexity of the recommendations, I have to say that I doubt that the member is serious about the change that he is suggesting by that part of his motion.

My second introductory observation about the motion is that I wonder if the member fully understands and appreciates the processes that we have already in place in this province that allow for full and meaningful participation of all members in this Assembly. Someone once said, Mr. Speaker, that a government member must vote like a wooden soldier, and I'm sure that many members who participate in the parliamentary system have felt at one time or another like a wooden soldier. I know that being a rookie myself in 1989, I very quickly felt like a wooden soldier, but I think you have to go beyond that and try to spend your time effectively in this House working at creative ways to deal with the process that we have and bringing forward creative ways of improving that process.

I'd like to just briefly, Mr. Speaker, today talk about how an MLA can have his or her case effectively heard in the Legislature. I'm sure that I don't have to reiterate to the Assembly the many responsibilities that we as MLAs all have to our constituents, firstly, and also, of course, to our personal convictions, and how challenging and often frustrating it can be to fulfill these responsibilities, particularly when, as now, we've been in legislative session for approximately three months. It seems to lose a little bit of the bloom on the blossom after that length of time.

My comments today will focus on what I believe are some of the more effective ways that an MLA can get his or her point across in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. I do apologize to members of the opposition parties if this information is new to them. It should have been provided to them at the time of their election to the Assembly, and I want to thank the members of the government caucus who went out of their way to make that information known to me when I was elected. Now, Mr.

Speaker, based upon the contents of this motion and the contents of previous Bills and motions that have been sponsored by both opposition parties, it's my guess that there is some misunderstanding of the process, so let me begin.

Let me begin. Obviously, the most traditional and the best recognized way for a Member of the Legislative Assembly to affect government policy is through Bills and motions. Bills, of course, are legislative proposals that would become law if passed by the Assembly, and motions are expressions of opinion or concern on particular subjects and may of course be quite substantive. As we take a look at the motion today by the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry, we can see just how substantive some of these motions can be.

For the benefit of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, once a Bill or a motion has been drafted and cleared by the Leg. Assembly Office, notice is given and it's placed on the Order Paper, and location on that Order Paper is now determined by a draw. It's true that members' public Bills and motions rarely receive Royal Assent. Often the debate is adjourned and the item is dropped to the bottom of the Order Paper. Although technically possible, once dropped to the bottom of the Order Paper, the Bill or the motion will not likely be debated again in that current session. But that doesn't mean that the member's point is not getting across. We all have a communication budget. We all have the opportunity to access those who are within our constituency and those throughout the province of Alberta who have views similar to those that we bring forward in our motions and Bills. For every motion and Bill there is open debate, and any member of the Legislature can speak to that motion or Bill. Therefore, even if that particular item is not accepted by the majority, it nevertheless has been raised and debated in public.

5:00

As parliamentarians we all know that free and open debate on issues is beneficial to a healthy democracy. Under such a pretense there are several other ways in which an individual is able to get his or her point across. First, question period, obviously an important vehicle for members. Each sitting day there's a 45-minute Oral Question Period in which an MLA can ask a minister of the Crown, a chairman of a committee, or a government representative on boards any question on government policy of concern to them.

MR. McINNIS: Within the rules.

MR. EVANS: Well, of course, Edmonton-Jasper Place. Of course within the rules.

The present situation in this province is that the opposition parties are given first priority in question period. Approximately 80 percent of the question period is utilized by the opposition parties, and even though the government side of the House is only given about 20 percent, we do, Mr. Speaker, take that time very seriously.

Another opportunity for the Members of the Legislative Assembly to participate in open debate is during the throne speech and the budget estimates. During these debates every member is entitled to speak. Each member can offer a unique perspective on particular points but also on general issues. An MLA can use this opportunity to talk about government planning, priorities, and achievements or any other areas that need to be emphasized. Our system of government, Mr. Speaker, is not designed to carry out the day-to-day business of government through MLAs; therefore, the responsibility is on

the MLA to utilize those opportunities available to him or her in the most effective way possible.

A third means of achieving that goal is the opportunity to participate through Legislature committees. In Motion 218 the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry is complaining that the process of legislative committees is flawed and useless. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to review how our current system operates and how I believe it provides members of the Assembly with sufficient opportunities to become involved in the processes of our government. It's choice. You can choose how much you want to become involved. Again I refer back to the fact that we've been here some three long months now. We've had quite a few opportunities to have input into the many questions that Albertans are faced with today.

Now, Alberta, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with other Canadian Legislatures, has three types of committees of the Assembly. I know that you're very well aware of those committees, but I'd like to just briefly review them for the sake of all members. Firstly, we have the committees of the whole Assembly: the Committee of the Whole and the Committee of Supply. We, of course, have select standing committees and select special committees.

The Committee of the Whole comprises the entire elected Assembly and deals with clause-by-clause examination of a Bill. The Committee of Supply also comprises all of those elected members in the Assembly and reviews the estimates of expenditures proposed by the government for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Legislature has seven select standing committees, one Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and a Select Special Committee on Constitutional Reform. Of course, all of us had a bit of a reprieve, other than those lucky members who are part of that select committee, to spend some time in our constituencies not too long ago while those 16 members went around the province and sought input from Albertans into Alberta's constitutional position vis-à-vis the other provinces and the federal government.

Guidelines for the creation, operation, and the membership of all of our committees, Mr. Speaker, are in the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, sections 49 to 66. Now, the membership of the committees of the Assembly is based upon the concept of proportional representation as much as is possible. The evolution of the legislative committees is long and well documented, and I would suggest to all members to refer to *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, 21st edition, pages 572 to 674, and *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, sixth edition, pages 221 to 245. The Alberta Legislative Assembly committee process recognizes, conforms with, and upholds the process of committees in democratic parliaments. The involvement of private members in the committee process is vital to continuing governance of this province.

Every Legislative Assembly committee has representations of each political party elected to the Assembly. Every member of each respective committee has the opportunity to fully discuss the business of the committee and to examine and to evaluate every issue that comes before the committee.

The Member for Edmonton-Glengarry is of the opinion that the Assembly committee process should be looked at in an effort to make it and therefore the government more open and accountable to its citizens. Well, Mr. Speaker, all of the select standing and special standing committees in this Legislature meet in public, often within this Chamber, and are accessible to the media if they wish to cover the business and concerns of the committee in question. As far as accountability goes, each and

every one of us is accountable for our actions and performance in the Assembly at election time.

Now, if the hon. member has serious doubts about the committee process in this Assembly, he should have proposed a separate motion to the Order Paper to deal with committees exclusively. This would allow, again, a much more in-depth examination of his concerns, but unfortunately the opportunity for examination and serious discussion is lost because of the all-encompassing nature of the motion. If the hon. member would like to bring forward a well-worded motion and to back it up with some sensible and workable suggestions, I'd welcome the opportunity to join him in the debate, but as part of the existing motion proper analysis and discussion of the committee process is almost impossible.

Mr. Speaker, it takes a lot of hard work, patience, and sometimes a great deal of imagination to be effective as a member of the Alberta Legislature, but there's nothing wrong with having to be creative. It's through that creativity that we in Alberta have become one of the premier provinces in all of Canada. For me and the members of the government caucus, we find it a stimulating challenge to be imaginative and creative. In fact, after looking at the contents of Motion 218, one might argue that its sponsor would like to depersonalize the entire legislative process. Perhaps the hon. member would rather see microcomputers in the Legislature than 83 individuals from all of the areas within the province representing vastly different perspectives on how to govern the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I have more than a little bit of trouble accepting Motion 218 the way it's presented, although clearly, in terms of commitment to parliamentary reform and the need to have parliamentary reform, I'm on side with the hon. member. Some of the recommendations in this motion have merit. However, when you consider that so many ideas were presented in the motion, as I've stated earlier, I'm inclined to question the motivation of the sponsor.

In conclusion, I'd like to suggest to the hon. member that he take some time to put some meat on the bones of his proposal set out in Motion 218 and then bring his ideas forward to the Assembly for thorough debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn.

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of the motion. I think it's an important motion, and I think it addresses a number of serious problems that I've experienced since I've been a member of the Legislature. It just basically suggests that we establish a special select committee "to consider reforms relating to the legislative process including but not limited to" half a dozen different, very specific measures.

5:10

Now, it draws attention to, first of all, the need for freedom of information legislation. On many occasions since 1986 I've addressed that. I've pointed out how difficult it is to get information from the government. When we do get up in question period, we don't get answers. We put motions for returns on the Order Paper; we don't get answers to questions. We've asked all kinds of questions of the Minister of Economic Development and Trade about loan guarantees. We've asked the Treasurer about information regarding . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You're just not getting the answer you want.

MR. PASHAK: No. We asked for the master agreement, for example, involving Peter Pocklington and Gainers. When did we get that? Have you seen a copy of it? Do you get that information? That's an important issue for us and for the voters in this province, and we've been consistently turned down.

Even in Public Accounts Committee we don't have an opportunity. If a minister wants to appear before the Public Accounts Committee and talk for the full hour and a half, he can almost get away with it. The chairman can't even really intervene to bring the minister to a halt in the middle of his speech because the minister's completely at the control of the majority vote on that committee. It just so happens that there are 21 members on the Public Accounts Committee; 15 of them are government members. [interjections] They've decided that, by vote, the members on the committee are going to control the procedures and processes of that committee. The same thing's true when we get into the estimates process.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please, hon. members.

Please proceed.

MR. WICKMAN: Tell him to smarten up.

MR. PASHAK: I'm supposed to tell somebody to smarten up, but I'm not quite sure who [inaudible] at least the hon. Minister of Education.

In any event, I think all members recognize that even when we get into the estimates process, a minister can make very long introductory remarks justifying his department's expenditures, and we in the opposition are lucky if we get in two or three members to speak in those estimates debates.

There are many more ways that we could proceed with the estimates that I think would bring a lot better information to members of the Assembly generally and would be in the interests of the public. Why do we all have to meet to go over one department's estimates? Why can't we have four estimates going at the same time? Why can't we meet longer with the minister? Why are we restricted to just having the minister before the estimates committee? Why can't we have senior officials from the department there, and why can't we examine them in depth with respect to their department expenditures? It seems to me that that's a reasonable suggestion. If we started to get into that, maybe all members of the Assembly would take a greater interest in having departments consider doing more efficiency audits, value-for-money audits, and that might become more of an institutionalized practice in this Assembly and by the government, thereby saving the taxpayers of this province – who knows? – countless millions of dollars. So that's another reform that should be looked at.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane. I'm really quite surprised at some of the suggestions and charges that he made in his remarks. He seemed to be on the one hand saying that he could agree with some of the comments that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry when he introduced his Bill, but he says he questions the motivation. I mean, what kind of innuendo is that? What is he trying to say on the record? It seems to me that this motion is really quite straightforward and embodies a whole series of things that should be looked at. He's got another objection: that it's too broad in terms of its content. Well, why not establish a committee, give the commit-

tee a mandate to look at that motion and establish its own frame of reference, bring that back to the Assembly? It may want to add to what's being proposed here. It may want to restrict or limit, but this just calls, basically, for the establishment of a special select committee of this Assembly to look at a number of issues that could make our operation more effective and more efficient. I'm sure that everybody, not just members of the opposition but members of the public more generally, would like to see that take place.

Now, the Member for Banff-Cochrane said in his remarks that each member can speak during the throne speech, speak during the budget estimates, and he says that even if you have . . . Well, first of all, I challenge that. Not every member does get an opportunity to speak on the throne speech; not every member gets a chance to speak during every department's estimates. So that's clearly not the case. He says that every member in this Assembly has the opportunity to influence, to have input into government legislation. Well, what is input if it's not effective? We can get up, perhaps, as a caucus and speak to any government measure. Members of our caucus certainly can speak to any Bill that's introduced, but not all members can. In any event, there's no way that we can deflect the government that's embarked on a specific course of action. If the government wants to bring in the most reactionary labour legislation in Canada, they can do that. We can try, we can try our darndest, we can introduce all kinds of amendments, we can prolong debate, but not one of those amendments was ever adopted or accepted by the government. So it's an illusion to think that just because you have input as a caucus, you can affect what actually happens in this Assembly.

I think an important reform that the government should consider and that I think would flow from this motion that the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry has introduced would be an opportunity for all members of the Assembly, from all parties in the Assembly, to meet in subcommittees to work on Bills before they're actually presented to the Assembly itself, to have input at that level. I think you'd get better legislation, and you'd get legislation that could proceed through the Assembly more quickly because it would in its very early stages, in its drafting stages, have true input that has concrete meaning involved in the design of that legislation.

So there's much that could be done to improve our operations in this Assembly. I don't pretend to be a guru and know exactly what all the possibilities would be here. But certainly, why not establish a committee to look at some of these suggestions? Why not try to make the operation of this Assembly more efficient, more responsive to the real needs of the citizens of Alberta? I can't see a single reason why the Member for Banff-Cochrane and members of this government generally would oppose such a suggestion.

I ask all members to support this particular piece of legislation.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Motion 218 by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, a request of the Assembly that a select special committee be established to consider reforms of our Assembly. We've heard from the sponsor of the motion. We've also heard from the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane and, more recently, the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn.

When I look at the six points covered in the motion, I'd like to spend a moment examining them in some detail. The first is that this select special committee consider "subcommittees of the Committee of Supply to consider estimates in greater detail, including questioning public servants." I would suggest to the mover of the motion that if the mover would ask his researcher to go back and examine some of the *Hansard* minutes from the Committee of Supply prior to 1986, he'll see that there was a very different process used by members of the opposition. We didn't have lengthy speeches given by members of the opposition. We had questions asked of the ministers, short, sharp questions, and in return ministers responded to those questions. Clearly, the opposition parties have chosen a different route. They have decided to monopolize the time when we're dealing with Committee of Supply, to give lengthy speeches. Go back and look at *Hansard*. The evidence is there. You don't have to reform the rules, hon. member. You have to use the time appropriately, and then there will be an opportunity for questions to be asked and answers given in the Assembly.

5:20

Secondly, "time limits for responses to written questions and motions for returns." It's very important that we examine this particular request carefully in that some written questions and motions for returns are straightforward and can be answered easily. Others are very complex and need considerable time. I wonder if the hon. member would also consider in such a request some consideration to the number of written questions and motions for returns that any one member can put on the Order Paper at a given time, because some members seem to be flooding the Order Paper. A concern has been expressed about the quality of the questions which are asked, the information which is being sought. Clearly on that particular point, do I as a member of the Assembly believe there's an opportunity for reform? Yes, I believe there's a way we can make the system work better under number two, and it's going to take some give-and-take on both sides.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Number three, "greater scope for free votes and a limitation of circumstances in which votes are considered votes of confidence." I think that's a fundamental question which needs to be addressed by not only this Assembly but all Assemblies operating under the British parliamentary system: matters which are considered votes of confidence, where a government can fall depending on the outcome of that particular vote. That's a matter which again, I think, some further consideration could be given to. I think there's greater latitude where we could use free votes in a more effective way in the Assembly.

"Private members' Bills and motions being brought to a vote by the Assembly." Now, on the surface, Mr. Speaker, that looks like a very reasonable request. The concern I would direct back to the mover of the motion is: how do you ensure that all members of the Assembly have an opportunity to make comments, to have input into the process, while at the same time putting a limitation on the length of time so that you can be assured that the Bill or the motion will in fact be brought to a vote? It goes back to the amount of time used by hon. members on the Bills and motions.

Number five, and I know this is something very near and dear to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, when he talks about "greater legal access to information, including the need for freedom of information legislation." This is an issue which I've

addressed with constituents I have the honour of representing, and I do it in this particular way: decisions made by the government are all public. There is no question about the decisions which are made. What is being sought through freedom of information legislation is the how: how the decision was made, why the decision was made, so others can examine them. Then you get into the myriad of questions on was it a right decision or not. In our process we stand before our electorate within a five-year period. Our electorate will decide whether the decisions we are making collectively are in their best interests or not. They have that right; indeed they have that responsibility. They take it very seriously, and they make the decisions. Once decisions are made by government, they're communicated and members stand . . .

MR. DECORE: Could I ask the member a question?

MR. BOGLE: When I'm finished my remarks, I'll be pleased to accept the question.

MR. DECORE: Not now?

MR. BOGLE: I'm merely taking a page out of the hon. member's book.

"Greater use of legislative committees." The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane went into some detail explaining the various committee structures we have in this Assembly: the Committee of the Whole, where we examine supplies not only for the various departments but for the Heritage Savings Trust Fund; our standing and our special select committees. In our standing and special select committees all parties in the Assembly are represented or at least are given the opportunity to be represented. There were times when at least one of the opposition parties chose not to participate at first although did so later on. I look to one of those committees in particular, the Legislative Offices Committee, in which all parties are represented. I think in particular of Public Accounts. The hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn chairs our Public Accounts Committee. At the most recent public accounts meeting in Canada, other provinces were surprised to find that our Auditor General reported back through an all-party committee of the Assembly rather than directly to the government of the day. In fact, at the most recent conference, held in St. John's, Newfoundland, the Auditor General discovered at the banquet that his term was terminated by the Liberal government in Newfoundland. That's how he was advised. That's not possible under our legislation. That's not possible under the process that we follow in Alberta with our Legislative Offices Committee. The all-party committee works with the three officers of the Assembly: with the Auditor General, with the Chief Electoral Officer, and with the Ombudsman. In that way there's input from all parties. It's a nonpartisan process, and it's a process that works extremely well.

The most recent selection process that the committee went through in choosing a new Ombudsman is an example of that, where we came out with a unanimous decision as to who the new Ombudsman should be. All parties agreed. That's a remarkable feat. The process that we're involved in right now with the special select committee on the Constitution. The most recent participation of members of the Assembly looking at electoral boundaries. I'm so pleased that the Supreme Court of Canada has come down reaffirming what Albertans told that committee. Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry can sneer if he likes, but Albertans told the committee the kind of process they wanted to see. Now we have the highest court

in Canada, the Supreme Court, which has reaffirmed that position. That's very special. That's very special, hon. member.

Now we're coming back to the role of our House leaders. This motion really asks the Assembly to do something that in at least five of the six points, I believe, our House leaders, representatives from all three political parties, have met and discussed in the past, will meet and discuss in the future. This is the role of the House leaders, when we talk about the rules in the Assembly. There have been discussions on a number of these points. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar believes that more consultation is needed, then she should do that with the other two House leaders of the Assembly.

The hon. mover of the motion indicated that he was very concerned about how Albertans perceive this Assembly. I would suggest to the hon. member that if he's concerned, as we all are, we should take a good look at question period and what's happened to the question period in this Assembly. Yes. Prior to 1986 we did not have preambles preceding questions. I ask the hon. member to go back and review *Hansard* again to confirm what I'm saying. The questions which were put by members of the Assembly, whether they be opposition or government, were put direct and square to the minister. The

minister in turn was expected to give a short, crisp response. When either of those two did not take place, the Speaker, enforcing our own rules, the rules of the Assembly, brought the members to task. The process worked. In 1986 our House leaders of the day decided that the rules should be modified and that we should allow preambles. I would suggest that something our House leaders might want to go back and take a look at is eliminating the preamble, bringing the temperature down and increasing the understanding level so that the decorum of the House is re-established. That in turn would be very important.

Mr. Speaker, I still have some other comments I wish to make, and as it's now 5:30, I beg leave to adjourn the debate.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]

