

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 1, 1995**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 95/03/01

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. ZARIWNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to table a petition with 98 parents' signatures from the Garneau parent support group urging the government of Alberta

to ensure all Alberta school boards provide the opportunity for each eligible child to receive a minimum of 400 hours of Early Childhood Services instruction per year.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek leave this afternoon to introduce two different petitions. The first one is signed by 30 Calgarians associated with the Calgary Boys' Choir and urges the Legislative Assembly

to affirm its support for an enhanced volunteer-based, not-for-profit charitable gaming system in Alberta [and further] . . . to ensure that sufficient revenues from our "made-in-Alberta" gaming system can be earned by communities and charities to enable these organizations to continue to provide their valued service to Albertans.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, has been signed by 98 Albertans from the Claresholm area and the Barons, Alberta, area. It urges the government

to ensure that no hospital beds are closed in South Western Alberta by an unelected Regional Health Authority without adequate consultation with residents.

Thank you.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave for the petition I tabled on Tuesday, February 28 on behalf of early childhood services to be read at this time.

CLERK:

We the undersigned Residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure all Alberta school boards provide the opportunity for each eligible child to receive a minimum of 400 hours of Early Childhood Services instruction per year.

We also request the Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to allow Alberta School Boards to use money from the Alberta School Foundation Fund to fund 400 hours or more of Early Childhood Services, as determined by the local community, so that there are no ECS user fees for 400 hour programs and so that all Alberta children have an equal opportunity or "level

playing field" to succeed and compete in life by having equal access to basic educational resources.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I presented to the House on February 27 be now read and received. It's the one regarding restoration of full kindergarten funding throughout Alberta.

CLERK:

We the undersigned Residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure all Alberta school boards provide the opportunity for each eligible child to receive a minimum of 400 hours of Early Childhood Services instruction per year.

We also request the Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to allow Alberta School Boards to use money from the Alberta School Foundation Fund to fund 400 hours or more of Early Childhood Services, as determined by the local community, so that there are no ECS user fees for 400 hour programs and so that all Alberta children have an equal opportunity or "level playing field" to succeed and compete in life by having equal access to basic educational resources.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented to the House on February 28 on early childhood learning now be read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned Residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure all Alberta school boards provide the opportunity for each eligible child to receive a minimum of 400 hours of Early Childhood Services instruction per year.

We also request the Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to allow Alberta School Boards to use money from the Alberta School Foundation Fund to fund 400 hours or more of Early Childhood Services, as determined by the local community, so that there are no ECS user fees for 400 hour programs and so that all Alberta children have an equal opportunity or "level playing field" to succeed and compete in life by having equal access to basic educational resources.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I rise to advise the House that I will rise again later to seek consent for the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly congratulate Cathy Borst and her teammates on representing our province at the Canadian women's curling championship during the Scott Tournament of Hearts play-off in Calgary last week.

This is of course pursuant to Standing Order 40.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two resolutions, from the St. Philip School Council and from the Sam Livingston Parent Advisory Council, urging the Legislature of the province of Alberta

to amend the School Act to mandate the right of access to fully funded kindergarten programming to a minimum of 400 hours per child per school year.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm filing today with the Legislative Assembly four copies of a letter and attachments dated February 21, 1995, that was sent by me to the regional health authority chairpersons which outlines the rationale behind regional funding targets for the fiscal year 1994-95 and on. These documents are filed to clarify statements made in question period yesterday, and they will show that funding decisions were made on evaluation, consultation, and focusing on meeting health needs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling four copies of resolutions from the St. Albert city council regarding gaming in Alberta. The council's position is that the province "should rethink its position regarding video lottery terminals . . . and follow the lead of New Brunswick by banning these machines."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table documents today being a chart of the Fraser Institute data taken from Tax Facts 8, which is the basis for the graph I tabled yesterday, and also data from the institute analysis of the 1994 budget for Alberta and the other provinces and a graphic representation.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a group of students from Linden, which is in the heart of my constituency. They are accompanied today by one teacher, Mrs. Elaine Boese, and five parents: Mr. Murray Woods, Mrs. Beth Gerlitz, Mrs. Patti Thiessen, Mrs. Bev Toews, and Mrs. Dorothy Brears. They're seated in the public gallery. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 98 very important people of whom 89 are students from grade 8 in Slave Lake. Slave Lake is approximately 250 kilometres north of Edmonton. They are here to partake in the process of what happens in the Legislature. They are accompanied by Mr. Bruce Turnbull, Mrs. Lynette Schultz, Miss Sue Giesbrecht, Mrs. Connie Baird, Mrs. Amy Leung, Mr. Dennis Woodard, Mrs. Betty Bittorff, Mrs. Warnke, Mrs. Eleanor Norris. I'd ask that they stand. They are sitting in both the public and the members' galleries. I'd ask that they please stand and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a resident

of Edmonton and a good friend. Mr. William Storr is here observing the proceedings today. Mr. Storr is a specialist in insurance fraud investigation and WCB investigation. I'd ask him to please rise and be welcomed by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Miss Julie Hadwin. Julie is the 1994 Premier's award winner. Julie is from Consort and has been involved in the Alberta 4-H programs for eight years. She has also received numerous awards at the club, district, regional, and provincial levels. The Premier's award is Alberta's highest 4-H award. It is given annually to a 4-H member in recognition of outstanding achievement, excellent communication and leadership skills, and their contribution to the community. The recipient serves as an ambassador for 4-H programs throughout the year. Rarely do we have an 18 year old with two pages of résumé with such significant attributes. Spoken of with much pride by the hon. Member for Chinook, it's my pleasure and my honour today to ask Julie, who is accompanied by her parents, Doug and Joan Hadwin, her brother Rick, and sister Joanne, to rise in the members' gallery and receive the usual warm reception of the members here.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, may I ask your indulgence to get a nod from one mom to see if her daughter made it yet? I'll catch you tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly students from the vital and growing University of Alberta Progressive Conservative Club. They have a bright future in this province. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I call their names: Cam Porter, Brian Koester, Mark Lyon, and Carla Barkley. I'll ask all members to give the students the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce four individuals with whom I had the pleasure of meeting over the noon hour. They are Reeve Frank Schoenberger, councillors Jack Pearse, Jerry Kaup, and Cal Putnam. They're all from the municipal district of Sturgeon. I do thank them for a very enjoyable time at noon. Give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

### **Calgary-McCall By-election**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, as this Legislature deals with issues of tremendous importance to Albertans – the budget, cuts to health care, cuts to education – upwards of 35,000 Calgarians have been left out. I'm referring to those Calgarians who reside in the constituency of Calgary-McCall, who have been without an MLA since November of 1994. Every day that goes by is still another day that these Calgarians have no voice and no vote here

in this provincial Legislature. To the Premier: why has the Premier ignored these 35,000 Calgarians by refusing to call this by-election?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not refusing to call the by-election. As a matter of fact, I have a legal responsibility to call the by-election for no later than – what is it? – May 17 I believe it is. I would like to be able to do this as soon as possible.

MR. MITCHELL: I wonder what he's afraid of.

Will the Premier commit to calling the by-election in sufficient time so that these 35,000 Calgarians will have an MLA at least before we debate and vote on the budget?

MR. KLEIN: Maybe.

MR. MITCHELL: Will the Premier at least make this commitment, if he's not prepared to make that commitment: to meet me in northeast Calgary to debate those issues – [interjections] I guess they don't want you to have to do it, Ralph – that are so important to the people of Calgary-McCall prior to voting day in Calgary-McCall?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will give that some thought, but let's understand that this is not this individual's election. This is the election of the Liberal candidate and the election of the Conservative candidate and the election possibly of the ND candidate and the election of whomever else might want to run in that constituency. I would think that there will be ample opportunities for those candidates from the respective parties to debate the issues. But I'll tell you what I will do. At some time down the road there is going to be an election. There is going to be a general election, and I will debate him anytime, anyplace, and as often as he wants throughout this province.

MR. MITCHELL: I guess he needs another year to get ready for me, Mr. Speaker.

#### Achievement Testing

MR. MITCHELL: My second question, Mr. Speaker, refers to a new video that's soon to be on the market and that is described in this memo that I'm going to table in the Legislature right now. I'd like to describe it to you. Scene 1 opens in a smoke-filled classroom where an ominous looking judge, played by none other than *Neon Rider's* Winston Reckert, stalks through a group of teachers sitting at their desks worrying about being judged on the basis of their students' test results. But as the scene changes, our neon rider convinces teachers that it's really not so bad. Teachers tell their colleagues that more and more achievement testing is the best thing since, and I quote, sliced bread. What I'm describing is the Department of Education's new video being shot this week in Edmonton and Calgary to sell more and more achievement testing. It's an insult to teachers, to students, and to parents. I wonder if the Premier could tell us: how much money is he robbing from the classroom to produce this insulting and offensive video?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education. [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I think he was talking; we just didn't hear him.

THE SPEAKER: Well, with the noise coming from that quarter, it's not surprising if he was.

#### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: I'd remind hon. members that the clock is ticking, and I've got many indications of people who want to participate in question period. Once the question's asked, would you kindly let the appropriate person try to answer the question.

#### Achievement Testing

(continued)

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I gather that the hon. leader is casting some aspersions on the achievement testing and using this to evaluate the school system. Although it is not the only measure of the performance of the school system, certainly performance in core subjects as measured by achievement tests is a relevant and good measure of the school system's performance.

1:50

MR. MITCHELL: If it's so good, I wonder why we have to have a video to sell it.

Why is the department paying for substitute teachers and mileage and asking teachers to leave their classrooms in order to be part of this video production? I wonder if the Premier could tell us that.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I just don't have those details. It's something that certainly is taking place within the Department of Education, and I think that the more appropriate person to ask would be the minister.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not have the specific details of expenditure on the different items whereby we do second teachers from the school system for curriculum development, for achievement testing preparation, for all those things. In fact, we do a great deal of work with school systems across the province and use their expertise, of which there is very much in the school system, for carrying on and preparing activities such as programs, curriculum, tests.

MR. MITCHELL: Since the minister doesn't seem to know about this video and since the government is going to force more and more achievement testing onto teachers, parents, and students anyway, why do we need to pay for this video, which is clearly nothing more than propaganda?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I now think the hon. leader is really getting to his concern, and that is achievement testing. As I've indicated before, yes, we will be spending money on achievement testing. We will be asking people to come in and work on that project. That is one of our important performance measures.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Education has decided that starting this year the provincial achievement testing program will be expanded at the grades 3, 6, and 9 levels. Amazingly, this government insists that all students must write the standardized tests, even those with special needs. Surely a fair and meaningful assessment would take into account

a student's ability and would not provide misleading signals to parents and the public. My first question to the Minister of Education: why are you forcing these special-needs children into such an impossible situation? How valid can those results be?

MR. JONSON: Provision will be made in the achievement testing program to provide for and to treat reasonably our high special-needs students. However, Mr. Speaker, let me also state clearly that we want achievement test results to be meaningful. We do not want large numbers of students exempted or staying home on a particular day just because the achievement tests are being written. They are there to provide a meaningful measure of the performance of the education system, something which we are not afraid of having done, and we intend to proceed with it. There will be the special provisions for those special cases.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department states that the special provision would be that if a test would be considered harmful to a student, he or she will not have to write it, but this exemption does not apply to all special-needs students. Mr. Minister, could you please define what "harmful" means?

MR. JONSON: Well, with respect to the term "harmful", there are appropriate definitions in the education community, but the point again, Mr. Speaker, is that there will be provisions made for those students who will not benefit or who would have some negative effect from having the tests administered. On the other hand, since the same question's been raised a second time, I'll give the same answer and emphasize it, and that is that we do want a broad participation in the achievement testing program, which we are expanding, because it is a good performance measure, something that is important for the public in the province, for school jurisdictions, for politicians, for teachers to have as a measure of the performance of the system.

MRS. SOETAERT: You're setting up kids for failure.

My final supplemental: what monitoring has the minister set in place to ensure that when students are exempted because the test will be harmful to them, this exemption will be applied consistently across the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we will make every effort to see that the exemption is applied consistently across the province. I think that the hon. member across the way should put a bit of faith and reliance in the school boards of the province, the school administrators, the teachers to make sure the policy is implemented correctly and not assume right at the beginning that someone will not be applying it correctly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

#### **Fletcher's Fine Foods Ltd.**

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last several weeks I've been contacted by some of the largest hog producers in Alberta. They are concerned by the perceived actions of the Alberta pork board. The pork board has been instructed by the Alberta government to divest ownership of Fletcher's. Alberta hog producers have paid for the plant with an extra tax. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural

Development. Does the minister have any knowledge of the pork board selling shares at a discounted rate to Vencap?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like others, I've heard rumours. I'm sure that if and when an agreement has been arranged, I will be advised, but at this stage all I have heard and all I'm aware of are rumours that are out there.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Since the pork board is created by an Act of this Legislature, can the minister investigate this issue and assure producers that this will not happen?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act is the framework under which marketing boards are established. The government, through the marketing council, ensures that boards operate consistent with the marketing plans. This is where government involvement ends. Any issue of shares or any share transfer that may transpire as a result of further actions must be addressed by either the company or by the securities branch.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Will the minister agree that since producers have paid for all the shares of Fletcher's Fine Foods, these shares will be divested to the producers?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, I certainly will. A plan is now in place whereby the shares must be in place or transferred within a period of two years. The clock is now ticking. This was established this fall, and the process is now moving through. However, there is a two-year time period whereby this is allowed to happen and transpire.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

#### **Child Welfare**

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a whopping 10-hour notice I managed to attend the child welfare meeting in my constituency this week. It appears that the government is either afraid of public input or simply not interested, because less than a dozen people out of the 60 in attendance raised their hands when asked: how many people are not paid to be here tonight? If this meeting reflects the government's understanding and commitment to true community development, these crucial reforms are in serious jeopardy. Mr. Minister, how can you allow public meetings to be held and conveniently forget to invite the public? This isn't community development; it's development by bureaucracy and interest groups.

MR. CARDINAL: The issue the member is talking about, of course, is the new child welfare action plan, which we announced recently, Mr. Speaker. It's a major step and a major change in how issues will be dealt with in relation to children. What has happened is that the issue, of course, has developed over 40 or 50 years, and it's a very sensitive issue. It is going to take some time to make the changes that are required out there. You know, I'm very optimistic that the direction we are going, to involve the community, is the right direction.

On the other hand, again I do not believe in, wherever possible, utilizing taxpayers' dollars that were directed to direct services to children for advertising programs of this nature. I believe the direction we are going, the direction we are using, Mr. Speaker, will deal with the issue effectively. I understand that the meetings are taking place across the province, and I find in the majority of the areas the meetings are well attended. If we find pockets of areas where attendance is not sufficient, we'll have another meeting; we'll have more meetings. If it requires advertising in those areas to attract more people in pockets of areas where it is necessary, we'll do that.

**2:00**

MS HANSON: You've got to tell the public about it, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, do you not realize that with every contrived meeting stacked only with bureaucrats and agency reps, you are destroying the credibility and the integrity of the reform process, the very important reform process? This is not how you build community partnerships.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, only the Liberals would see negativeness in a project like this. Just recently, November 30, both that member and the new leader put out a press release supporting the concept of that whole process of reshaping child welfare. They support integrated services. They support allowing aboriginal communities direct control of services. In fact they support focus on early intervention. Now, these are complicated issues. We are not going to resolve them in one month.

The meetings have just commenced, and again I will say to the public out there that in pockets of areas, not all of Alberta – we're not going to go advertising in a provincewide campaign that costs thousands of dollars, because those dollars are designed for children's services. One thing I promise the member: in pockets of areas where the attendance is not sufficient, we will advertise.

MS HANSON: Well, Mr. Minister, if you don't tell people about meetings, you don't get a broad . . .

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MS HANSON: Will the minister listen to the professionals and the agency representatives who were at Monday's meeting and wondered aloud where the public was? The professionals were asking where the public was. Would you demand that the meetings be rescheduled?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, like I said in my first two answers, if there are areas where the attendance is low and we require more public participation and input, we will advertise in those areas, but I am not willing to spend dollars that are designed for program delivery in a high-needs area to be used for advertising.

I also want to advise the public, Mr. Speaker, that the same member is working on a social policy for the Liberals. The same member is out there quietly meeting with individuals across the province so they can design their social policy. I don't see them advertising their meetings.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

### Red Deer College

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Red Deer College has demonstrated their ability to manage change, improve the delivery of its programs, and is the most cost-effective post-secondary institution in Alberta. Because of increasing cost pressures they would like answers to the following. The new Municipal Government Act has precipitated an increase in property tax on student residences because the municipality can no longer exempt them from the educational portion, an exemption they have traditionally held. My first question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will the minister consider the implementation of a mechanism such as an exemption clause to prevent this taxation increase?

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, there is a process by which the municipality may exempt these residences from both municipal taxation and school taxation, but if they do that, they have to make up that portion of the school requisition from the general tax base that they have around. Certainly they can exempt them now, but they do have to make it up.

MR. DOERKSEN: To the minister of advanced education: what process is the minister using to develop a funding framework that recognizes and rewards efficiently run colleges like Red Deer?

MR. ADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, just last week I announced the first steps towards developing a new accountability measures process in our public postsecondary education system. Our hope is that by agreeing on a set of indicators, we can eventually advise Albertans on the results achieved at our learning institutions. There's a lot of support out there for this type of system, and I'm really pleased with the ground that we're breaking with respect to the new funding mechanism for our postsecondary system. We still have a ways to go. We don't have any jurisdiction that we can copy this from. We don't know of another place where it's being done.

The indicators that I announced last week are only a small step towards reaching that point. I will say this to the hon. member: the mechanism will not be a top-down approach, and we will be working in close consultation with the institutions that are involved.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Minister, Red Deer College needs to have this implemented as soon as possible. What is the target date for the implementation of the new funding framework?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, in our three-year business plan we outline a schedule for implementing a new funding mechanism to reward performance and productivity in our system. We intend to meet that deadline, and our intention is to have it in place by the 1996-97 fiscal year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### Seniors' Programs

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta seniors just began paying the regressive flat tax on health six months ago. Now these same seniors are faced with an increase in health care taxes, and on April 1 of this year seniors living in subsidized housing will be facing another increase in their rent resulting in a 20 percent increase in just one year's time, from 25 percent of

their income to 30 percent. Yesterday the hon. Premier said that he knows the Fraser Institute, and he graciously invited me to his office to look at his plaque. [interjections]

MR. N. TAYLOR: Oh, you dog, you. You dog. Do you realize we're on TV? This is a family show.

MRS. HEWES: Today, Mr. Premier, not to trivialize, I would invite the Premier to look at the Fraser Institute's latest report on taxation of families headed by citizens over 65 for 1994, which I tabled earlier, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Fraser Institute shows that in 1994 Alberta families headed by seniors were paying more in provincial taxes than the Canadian average and that many seniors will soon be facing even more cost increases, I ask again of the Premier: where is the Alberta advantage for Alberta seniors?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, those figures could be interpreted many ways, and one of the ways they could be interpreted is that these are households headed by a senior, a person over 65 years of age. There could be a tremendous combined income in that household if the sons and daughters are living in that household and are wage earners, if the grandchildren are living in that household and are wage earners. Perhaps those people have very good, high-paying jobs, and if they do, naturally they would be paying a considerable amount in income tax.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, in response, the Premier's advisory council reports that only 7 percent of Alberta seniors even live with relatives.

My supplementary is to the minister responsible for seniors. Would the minister please table the evidence that he related yesterday regarding the justification for reducing the Alberta seniors' benefit by \$3.6 million in 1995-96.

2:10

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing that I'd like to do is clarify exactly the use of the information that was provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. She made the suggestion that the average taxes that were paid by seniors were in the range of \$25,000 per year, when in fact, as the Premier correctly pointed out yesterday, the median income for single seniors in the province of Alberta is about \$15,000, which means that there are half of seniors which are above \$15,000 and half of seniors which are below. The fallaciousness of the reasoning in the suggestion that the average senior pays \$25,000 in taxes goes into the assumptions that were made with respect to these taxes that were rolled in. It includes royalty taxes, which are paid by businesses and not by individuals. So, accordingly, there's a great deal of faulty reasoning in the information which has been used by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, just for the minister's information, royalty taxes are rolled in in all provinces across . . .

MR. DINNING: They are not.

MRS. HEWES: Yes, they are. Ask the Fraser Institute. [interjections] Maybe . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Question.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, if the Fraser Institute's numbers are being challenged, perhaps we should send the plaque back.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to question the minister further on why the chair of the Seniors' Advisory Council has to secure information on the appeal procedure from the minister during question period. I thought you two talked to each other.

MR. MAR: Of course we do, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to supplement the minister's comments and identify the fact that the appeal process was spoken to in specifics in the budget delivery, and I felt it was appropriate to clarify for all Albertans from this House, from the minister responsible for seniors exactly what that process was.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

#### Health Department Capital Projects

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Just be quiet, I'll get to it. Thank you. The three-year business plan for Health includes capital expenditures in the amount of \$110 million per year. The allocation of such dollars in past years has been the subject of intensive lobbying and public scrutiny partially due to the lack of disclosure regarding prioritization and evaluation of requests. As stated in the House by the Health minister, her department will leave politics aside and base its capital allocation on demonstrated health care needs. Could the Minister of Health briefly explain and subsequently table in this House what the criteria for these decisions will be?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First let me clarify the funding. It is \$111 million that are allocated for 1995-1996.

The qualifications and the guidelines for allocation of capital dollars are guidelines that were approved by this government, and they were communicated to all regional health authorities, the Provincial Mental Health Board, and the Alberta Cancer Board, because they are also involved in delivering health services. I communicated those on January 10 this year. They are based on a demonstration of need, and it does suggest that capital projects would focus on needs not wants, that alternatives to institutionally based services must be considered as a priority, that operational cost-effectiveness must be demonstrated, and also that they should adhere to inpatient guidelines that are set for the province. These guidelines are quite specific, and if the hon. member would like a copy of them, I would be happy to provide one to him and/or bring it to the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you. In light of some capital projects already being in progress, Mr. Speaker, could the minister tell the House what those projects are and why others are delayed?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear over the past year when the capital projects for this province for health projects were frozen that we would be preparing a provincial capital plan for health. I requested that information from the regional health authorities in their updated business plans, and we did suggest that if there were projects that had an urgency to them or that were integral to a region moving ahead with their restructuring, we would consider those on an individual basis. We have

done that with three projects. One is the Alberta Cancer Board, where we have allocated funds to the Tom Baker centre, and that is for additional vaults for linear accelerators. There was a very urgent need in southern Alberta for that additional capacity. We have allocated 7 and a half million dollars to the Calgary regional health authority in order to consolidate the cardiovascular programs and other programs on that site. We have also allocated dollars to the Northern Lights regional health authority, and that is for conversion to long-term care beds in the Fort McMurray area. It should be pointed out that that area had no long-term care beds, so there was urgency in that case too.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the minister be in a position to table in this House a complete list of capital projects requested by the regional health authorities inclusive of the final list of projects to be funded and the reasons therefor?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I can give the hon. member an exact date. I have asked the regional health authorities to examine their capital priorities very carefully. They have initially sent in some of their projections, but obviously to do a provincial plan and in order to ensure that it does meet the provincial needs and in order to meet restructuring, it's important that we have all of the capital requests from the regions. I have asked them to please get those in to me as soon as possible. We will prepare a provincial plan which will be based on the guidelines that I outlined earlier, and I have made a commitment to the regions that with their co-operation this provincial plan will be available very early in this budget year.

#### Sale of Public Land

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table two documents which clearly show that the government sold public land for less than half the purchase price. This government has sold public lands at fire-sale prices resulting in significant losses to Albertans. In the business plan of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services it states that an order in council will not – and I stress will not – be necessary for the sale of public lands. Governments are supposed to be accountable and open, not secretive. My question is to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. Why, Mr. Minister, is this government deviating from a long-standing tradition of Canadian governments by selling public lands in secret?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we are not selling it in secret. We did change our process last year to list our land with the real estate companies. Everybody gets a chance at that particular time to buy the land. We have the land appraised, and then we give it to the real estate people to get the highest price out of it.

2:20

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, he forgot that the order in council is no longer there.

To the same minister: what has the difference been between the book value of land sold and the actual selling price? In other words, how much money have you lost?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, much of this land that we're talking about was bought 10 or 15 years ago, and, yes, there was a higher price for land at that time. Times change. We sell it now for appraised value. We are not going to hold on to land forever. When you talk about losing money, we sell it at appraised value. Yes, there are some losses, but those are losses from previous years. Times and conditions have changed.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, they sure haven't learned anything from the past.

How will Albertans know in the future whether or not this government is selling the lands to their friends for 50 percent of the original price or, heaven forbid, for less?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, I explained in my first answer that the highest bidder gets it. It goes through the real estate companies. It's on MLS listing. So we have nothing to do with it. It is given to those people to sell at a commission, I might add.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### Vehicle Width Restrictions

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. As the tourist season draws near, I'd like to bring a concern to the attention of the House. It's come to my attention that RV owners from the United States, specifically Californians, wanting to travel to Alaska through Alberta are afraid to enter the province due to width restrictions on Alberta highways. Now, has the minister been made aware of this reluctance to travel into Alberta because the awning rails on their trailers cause them to exceed the width restrictions?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we do have a width restriction in the province of Alberta. It's 2.6 metres, which is eight feet, six inches. A lot of the RVs that do travel have been modifying the awnings that come out that people have, you know, to sit under on a nice day under the Alberta skies. A lot of those vary from four to five inches. I think that it's high time we deregulate in this province. I have to talk to the manufacturers in the province, because they are working under an unfair or unlevel playing field. We haven't been overenforcing the width restriction as they travel through Alberta, but then we're holding our manufacturers to the same compliance. So I would like to state here today that we're going to deregulate this, but we're still going to maintain a safety criteria for undue widths.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, that's terrific. Might I ask the minister, then, when we might expect to find such a revision to this restriction?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. WEST: Yes. Seeing that the tourist season's coming up and we want to certainly facilitate to the best of our ability, I'll be taking it forward as soon as possible in the process.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like the last supplementary, then, to be to the minister of Economic Development and Tourism. Can the minister advise what methods or what tools he would have at his disposal to ensure that once these regulations have been revised, we can get

that message to the Americans and especially those RV owners in California?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for Economic Development and Tourism.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, communicating and marketing to the markets of the United States for tourism is an important priority of the department. We want to be sure that we tell those 840,000 trips that were made in 1991 and that are increasing that in fact we are responding to the marketplace so that they can travel by RV, which 8 percent of them do, or by car, which 43 percent of the trips do, and in fact let them know that not only are there economic advantages to the Alberta advantage, but there are tremendous tourism advantages as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. WEST: Yes. I'd like to supplement. The message, to the person posing the question, also has to go to the rest of Canada. We are consistent with the rest of Canada at the present time, but here's a law that's really not enforceable in a practical sense. These awnings hang on the right side of the vehicle, not where they meet each other going down the highway. So we'll also have to send the message to the rest of Canada now, because as soon as this is passed, we'll be the only province in Canada that has a practical regulation.

#### Eye Care

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, first the Minister of Health deinsures some eye exams, and then – then – afterwards she appoints a task force on primary eye care, this in spite of the fact that there's an existing Eye Care Disciplines Advisory Committee. Now, it's curious that the existing committee conducts its business in open and is chaired by a member of the public, while the new committee appointed by the minister meets behind closed doors and is chaired by a Tory MLA. Madam Minister, why does your handpicked committee only meet in secret and without public representation?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I try to be very patient with the hon. member across, but really I do wish, I really do wish that he . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order please. [interjections] Order. There are still some members who want to ask questions and the time is going. Hon. members, please allow the minister to answer the question.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member really does have to, I think, try a little bit harder to understand the difference between a visual eye examination and what a primary eye care examination might be. The eye discipline advisory committee carries out a very, very important function in this province and carries out its responsibilities extremely well. However, there was a question as to whether Alberta Health should have a primary eye health exam, not a vision exam, not to check whether you need a certain strength of glasses: primary eye health care. Who would you ask that of? Well, you would ask somebody from the medical profession, which are the ophthalmologists, who have a person on this committee; somebody from the optometric profession, who have somebody on this committee; somebody being the dean of medicine at the University of Alberta or his

designate who would be an expert in that area; and the dean from Waterloo, which happens to be the . . .

MR. SAPERS: How about the public?

MRS. McCLELLAN: If you listen, you might not be so far off base in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this committee is chaired by a very capable, impartial chairman who will bring a report on this very important area to the minister very soon.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. More health care by committee.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health keep on setting up committee after committee after committee until she gets the answer that her government wants, or will she pay attention to what the advisory committee already said about the role for optometrists?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member is confusing the issues. This has nothing to do with the issue that I am sure he is alluding to, and I'm not going to get into it here.

What I said in my previous answer is exactly the reason for this committee. The ophthalmologists understand it, the optometrists understand it, and I wish that the hon. member would try. Should we provide a primary eye health exam in this province? If we should, who should? I think this expert committee, with an impartial chairman, is exactly the person to bring that advice to this minister and this government.

MR. SAPERS: If everybody understands it all so well, I wonder why we're having all of these committees meeting and all the ophthalmologists coming to see you next week.

How can the minister assure Albertans that her predetermined agenda for changes in eye care will not affect public safety?

2:30

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, again I'm being very patient, but the member cannot respond after he hears an answer. I explained in the first instance who was on this. Now, if the dean of medicine, who trains ophthalmologists or is responsible for their training, and the dean of optometry at the University of Waterloo are not competent to tell us what optometrists can do, then I am sure I don't know who is. I am sure it's not that member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

#### Utility Tax Rebate

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy. Albertans throughout the province are concerned about the federal government's removal of the Public Utilities Income Tax Transfer Act, also known as PUITTA. The federal minister has indicated that this was simply removing a subsidy to business. Can the minister explain why this so-called subsidy was put in place originally?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is an important issue for all Albertans as it affects every Albertan, whether they're at home or in business. Back in 1947 . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: I remember that.

MRS. BLACK: We know you remember it, hon. Member for Redwater, but some of us weren't even born then.

Mr. Speaker, this was put in place because there was a tremendous proliferation of Crown corporations across Canada on a province-by-province basis. PUITTA was put in place to provide a level playing field between jurisdictions, between the Crown-owned, non tax-paying corporations and the private sector. Removal, quite frankly, of PUITTA from the tax system is highly discriminatory against those jurisdictions with private-sector utility companies. To call this a subsidy is absolute lunacy. It is not a subsidy; it is a level playing field. In fact, in the Budget Address itself from the federal government it said,

These payments were intended to "help level the playing field" between privately owned utilities, which pay income taxes, and provincially owned utilities, which do not.

To answer the question, it was put in place to provide fairness and a level playing field across Canada.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what will be the cost to Albertans of this federal action?

MRS. BLACK: The cost, unfortunately, is quite horrendous for Albertans. Alberta is one of the provinces that passed the rebate through to consumers, i.e. Albertans. It will be felt by Albertans from north to south, east to west. Also, Mr. Speaker, because we have predominantly a private-sector industry, with roughly less than 10 percent of the population, it is felt that we will bear about 70 percent of the burden of this change of thinking in the federal tax. Roughly around \$170 million will be borne by Albertans. Clearly, this is highly discriminatory and should not be in effect.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in light of this action, is the minister considering recommending to the government that it create its own Crown corporations to benefit from the removal of PUITTA?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, no.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, may I supplement the answer?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DINNING: Every provincial government in this country receives revenues from its utilities. Between British Columbia and Quebec there is one province that takes the least absolute amount of money from their utilities by way of provincial revenues, and that's here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

I can advise the Assembly that it was the Member for Redwater who wrote to the papers recently recommending that Mr. Martin remove PUITTA and thereby increase taxes on Alberta consumers of power. It was the Member for Redwater, and that is on the record. It's in our public newspapers.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The time for question period has expired. The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services indicated that he wished to augment a previous answer.

#### **Child Welfare** (continued)

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, just briefly. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly today asked about the 60 public meetings that we're holding on reshaping child welfare.

I just want to advise the member that there were six meetings planned within the Edmonton area, and there are going to be three more meetings, in fact on March 6 and 13 in Edmonton and on March 14, 1995, in St. Albert. The phone number in Edmonton is 427-0003 and in Calgary, 297-4575. In case anyone is interested, they can contact them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

MS HANSON: Thank you. Mr. Minister, I'm aware of the fact that the list of meetings is out, but that list was not circulated to anyone but professionals and agency people until my office phoned and asked for one for us and asked them to circulate it to the public. As far as I know, so far all I've been told is that it's too expensive to circulate widely.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Question period has expired. The next matter is points of order, and there are none from today that the Chair is aware of.

#### **Point of Order** **Misleading the House**

THE SPEAKER: However, yesterday, February 28, 1995, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rose on a point of order concerning remarks made by the Premier. After an intervention by the Government House Leader the Chair undertook to review the Blues before deciding on that point of order.

To review the circumstances giving rise to the point of order during question period yesterday, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar tabled a graph from the Fraser Institute, a letter and a report from another individual, and asked questions relating to taxation of seniors and seniors' benefits. Following question period the Premier supplemented the answer he gave during question period. In supplementing his earlier answer, the hon. Premier said, "The document that she tabled, by the way, which was attached to a letter from a Mr. Con Duemler, I have to say was misleading at best."

It was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's contention that the Premier's comments were directed at her and not the institute that produced the documents. With respect, I must disagree with the hon. member. As the Chair has indicated on several occasions, most recently February 16, 1995, there must be an allegation that a member deliberately or intentionally misled the House for the use of the word "mislead" to be out of order. The Chair does not find that the allegation was made by the Premier.

The Chair would like to add once again that the term is one that is often associated with lying, which is distinctly unparliamentary. The Chair would again caution members about exercising great caution and restraint in using this term.

As far as the Government House Leader's comments about withdrawing his remarks, the Chair would point out that *Hansard* did not record nor did the Chair hear any remarks by him during the exchange on the supplementary answer.

#### **hand: Motions under Standing Order 40** **2:40**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has an application to make pursuant to Standing Order 40.

#### **Canadian Women's Curling Championship**

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would briefly like to plead a case of some urgency to deal with this Standing Order 40 to congratulate Cathy Borst and her teammates. Since the

women's Canadian curling championship just occurred some 72 hours ago, we have today an excellent opportunity to extend our sincere congratulations formally, and I would beg the indulgence of the House to proceed and let this motion be now presented and addressed.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Is there agreement in the Assembly to allow the hon. member to put his motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

Moved by Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly congratulate Cathy Borst and her teammates on representing our province at the Canadian women's curling championship during the Scott Tournament of Hearts play-off in Calgary last week.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to extend through this motion our very sincerest congratulations and thank you to Cathy Borst as well as her teammates – lead, Katie Horne; second, Deanne Shields; third, Maureen Brown; and fifth, LaDawn Funk – on their tremendous participation and outstanding wins at last week's Canadian women's curling championship.

I was in Calgary at the time that this Scott Tournament of Hearts was occurring, and the air was filled with excitement by curling enthusiasts from all over Canada who swarmed into Calgary to participate and/or cheer the different teams on. Our particular team that represented Alberta at this championship played extremely well in all the games leading up to the final. They pulled off some outstanding victories, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, they weren't quite able to win over the Manitoba rink, but in spite of that, they did us proud in their endeavours.

The final itself, Mr. Speaker, was a great example, a great game of excellent marksmanship and tremendous sportsmanship by both teams, but I would like to single out in particular the rink from Edmonton that worked so hard. They in fact played five very difficult and extremely exciting matches almost back to back within a 27-hour period to earn their way into the semi-finals and subsequently into the finals. That in itself is a tremendous accomplishment that shows the kind of character and firm resolve that these excellent curlers, these tremendous Alberta women, were able to exemplify.

In congratulating them, I'm sure that Cathy Borst and her teammates would like to thank the thousands of curling fans for their support and encouragement. Today, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our Alberta Liberal caucus, as well as members opposite, we have an opportunity to thank them for everything that they've done to put Alberta on the larger curling map, and I would hope in that instance that all members of the House would support this motion to congratulate Cathy, Katie, Deanne, Maureen, and LaDawn, our outstanding curlers from the Ottewell curling club in Edmonton.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an MLA from the city of Calgary and on behalf of my colleagues on this side of the

House I would certainly like to offer our congratulations to Cathy Borst and her teammates who represented Alberta so superbly. Anyone who watched this competition was very impressed with the high level of skill and also the excellent sportsmanship which was demonstrated by these fine Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, there was more than one winner at the Scott Tournament of Hearts, and in our hearts and minds Cathy and her teammates were also winners. We thank them for representing our province with such an outstanding performance. On behalf of all Albertans I would like to offer congratulations and best wishes to Cathy Borst and her teammates. We will all watch for your future success in the sport of curling.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried, let the record show unanimously.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places except for written questions 149, 150, and 151.

[Motion carried]

#### **Magnetic Resonance Imaging**

Q149. Moved by Mr. Bruseker on behalf of Mr. Sapers that the following question be accepted:

Excluding instances involving settlement of private insurance claims, provincial Workers' Compensation Board cases, and out-of-province WCB cases, how many Albertans accessed magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, in private clinics during the periods April 1, 1990, to March 31, 1991; April 1, 1991, to March 31, 1992; April 1, 1992, to March 31, 1993; and April 1, 1993, to March 31, 1994?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I will accept the question.

[Motion carried]

#### **Magnetic Resonance Imaging**

Q150. Moved by Mr. Bruseker on behalf of Mr. Sapers that the following question be accepted:

How many Albertans accessed hospital-based magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, during the periods April 1, 1990, to March 31, 1991; April 1, 1991, to March 31, 1992; April 1, 1992, to March 31, 1993; and April 1, 1993, to March 31, 1994?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we will accept that question.

[Motion carried]

### Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Q151. Moved by Mr. Bruseker on behalf of Mr. Sapers that the following question be accepted:  
How many Albertans in need of magnetic resonance imaging were on a waiting list for access to a publicly funded MRI during the periods April 1, 1990, to March 31, 1991; April 1, 1991, to March 31, 1992; April 1, 1992, to March 31, 1993; and April 1, 1993, to March 31, 1994?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we will accept that question.

[Motion carried]

head:

### Motions for Returns

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 164, 166, 172, 173, 175, 180, and 181.

[Motion carried]

### Telexel Holding Limited

M164. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any agreements or amended agreements between 496072 Alberta Ltd. and Telexel Holding Limited concluded between January 1, 1994, and February 13, 1995.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully recommend to the Assembly that this motion not be agreed to. I do appreciate the hon. member's persistence in seeking this information. As he well knows, we have not in the past been able to provide this information, and even the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 15(1), mandatorily exempts providing information about third parties that contain financial information provided in confidence.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the concern that the hon. member has on this issue, and hopefully with his concurrence I'm going to file a letter that I've provided to the member recently regarding this matter. It refers to NovAtel. I'm going to read parts of the letter, and I'll file it with the Assembly.

When NovAtel requested changes to the earn-out agreement to facilitate a financial restructuring of its business, the government faced a choice. We could refuse to change the agreement, with the probable result that NovAtel would fail. Alternatively, we could change the agreement conditional on getting a substantial payment up front and a due diligence review verifying the information presented to us. In March, the government agreed to settle the obligation for the \$603,920 paid in 1993, a payment of \$6,000,000 in April, 1994 and a further \$6,000,000 payable by April 1, 1999.

I made it clear that the amending agreements contained details about NovAtel's private financial arrangements, so I could not release them, but instead I chose to have an independent review done, an arm's-length independent review that would verify the appropriateness of this renegotiated agreement, Mr. Speaker. I can read briefly from a letter provided to us in March of '94 from the law firm Milner Fenerty. Mr. Dennis R. Thomas, QC, stated that

based on the due diligence inquiries and the valuation methods used, the settlement contained in the Settlement Agreement appears to be fair and reasonable taking into account all of the

circumstances revealed to us in the documents and interviews which have been described in this letter.

So providing that information is, I think, appropriate to this Assembly, but as to the specific matter of the member's motion, I would respectfully once again recommend that the Assembly do vote against this motion.

2:50

DR. PERCY: I would urge hon. members to vote in favour of the motion for a return. The material that the Provincial Treasurer refers to we received subsequent to filing this motion for a return. As the Provincial Treasurer says, it sets out very clearly the relationships between Telexel and NovAtel and also provides the independent assessment by Dennis Thomas, QC. While I appreciate the fact that there has been an arms-length review, I do think, since these are taxpayer dollars, that Members of the Legislative Assembly, who ultimately are responsible as we visit and meet with our constituents, should see those agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

### Regional Health Authorities

M166. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all information submitted to the Minister of Health by all 17 regional health authorities from July 1, 1994, until February 13, 1995.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities have been in considerable correspondence with the Department of Health and with the Minister of Health. What this motion asks for is really quite straightforward. We'd like copies of the information exchanged between the minister and the regional health authorities to be made public.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that this motion might be amended. I would be pleased to provide the hon. member with as much information as I can, but if he would consider an amendment to this motion and put in the word "public" before "information," I think it would make it much easier for me to meet his requirements.

Certainly it is our desire to share information, but to expect that a minister would share every piece of writing – does this include telephone conversations, queries? Mr. Speaker, I have had made every effort to make all of the information I have provided to the regional health authorities public by news releases, by announcements. In fact, I think I am criticized sometimes by the members opposite for too much of that.

I think it's a very unusual request to phrase it in this way. I would be quite happy to provide as much information that would be of interest to the public if we could put that condition on this motion, and then I would be able to accept it, hon. member.

MR. N. TAYLOR: If I may, Mr. Speaker. I'm very bothered with the amendment. One must remember and I think the House should be aware that these regional health authorities are appointed bodies. They're not elected, yet they're dealing with literally millions, maybe billions of dollars of government buildings and expenditures. As appointed bodies it becomes even more important that their business be carried on in public.

They've also followed, at least in my area and some of the areas I know, the rather lamentable practice now of having meetings in camera. Now they're talking maybe one meeting a

month which is public and the other three or four in camera. These are people that are appointed by the minister spending millions and up to a billion dollars of the government's money, and then they may be passing information to the government. I think that people should have the right to know anything they would as if it were an elected body like school trustees or municipalities. Municipalities have sort of a regulation that doesn't allow them to keep secret. The same rules of secrecy should apply to these health boards as apply to municipalities even though they are appointed.

I think the minister's heart is in the right place by putting in an amendment saying public information. Some people might say that half a loaf is better than none. In this case only a piece of the crust is better than nothing. We're getting very, very little, because who is going to divine the words "public information" or so what? It's like you're going home to see what's in the newspaper.

If the minister would amend it to say that all the information that would be required from an elected municipal council will also be applied here, then I think we would be much more satisfied with the result.

**THE SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora probably should have been recognized first because his participation on the minister's amendment is not closing the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

**MR. SAPERS:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's okay. We'll get to it.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's willingness to share information that she would consider public that heretofore has not been shared, and I would encourage the minister to do that regardless of the outcome of this motion. I'm afraid that I can't accept the amendment. The issue here is that these regional health authorities were picked by the Minister of Health, and they're really only accountable to the Minister of Health, and the information that's been exchanged between the authorities and the minister cannot be characterized in any way as private conversations or correspondence. These regional health authorities are carrying out a public interest, and they are acting in the public good, supposedly. If the minister had said: perhaps we'll amend it so that the release of information would be consistent as though we had a fully implemented freedom of information law in this province, I may have considered that a little more favourably, but in fact we don't have that law fully implemented and operating.

I can't accept the proposed amendment. I think it's very important that all Albertans are made aware in the entirety of the information that's being exchanged. Mr. Speaker, there's information about capital plans, about laboratory restructuring, about the jobs of thousands if not tens of thousands of Albertans, and of course the lives of every Albertan. There are consultants' reports being tabled. There are investigations and studies and needs analyses that have been produced, and I think this is all public information. It really behooves the Minister of Health to treat it as public and not private information. We have to look at the impact that the withholding of this information would have on the future of the medical staff of the province and the future of all the ancillary health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, this particular amendment would not serve the motion well, so I can't support it. But as I said, regardless of the outcome of the vote on the motion, I would hope the minister would take this as a signal. I accept her at her word: that all the information she currently does have she will table with the Assembly.

[Motion as amended carried]

### Federal/Provincial Fiscal Arrangements

**M172.** Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing any studies or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government between January 1, 1993, and February 13, 1995, pertaining to reform of federal/provincial fiscal arrangements, including the fiscal transfer system, social policy reform, and the tax collection agreements.

**MR. DINNING:** Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you how delighted I am for the hon. Liberal member across the way to rise and ask for information "pertaining to reform of federal/provincial fiscal arrangements, including the fiscal transfer system, social policy reform, and the tax collection agreements" when his Liberal brethren in Ottawa not 48 hours ago reduced transfers to this province by some nearly 31 percent by 1997-98. Thirty-one percent. They took 31 percent of our transfer.

**MR. HENRY:** You're not going to start whining; are you?

**3:00**

**MR. DINNING:** No, you won't catch me whining, but let me just make the observation: a 31 percent reduction when they didn't tax their gold-plated pension plan. The Liberal Madonna lady, Sheila Copps, is not going to get \$3.3 million when she graduates; she's going to get \$2.7 million. Poor Madonna. There are the same Liberals across the way who are defending their Liberal brethren in Ottawa, their brothers and sisters in Ottawa. They took a 31 percent cut to our transfers. They touched the CBC 4 lousy percent. I think it's intolerable. I'd be red - I'd be ashamed - as the Member for Edmonton-Roper is with that red tie he's got on. His whole face should be as red as his tie, Mr. Speaker. And then farmers. Well, you know the minister of agriculture has made it abundantly clear how embarrassed the Liberals across the way should be about the budget that their Liberal brethren came down with the other day that regrettably singled out . . .

**DR. PERCY:** Does this mean no, Jim?

**MR. DINNING:** What was your first clue, Mikey?

I think the Minister of Energy made it clear today as well. The singling out of the Public Utilities Income Tax Transfer Act: that's going to have an impact on Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge, especially as it relates to this motion, because you would want me to speak to this motion, as it relates to transfers to the province, we realize that these are the consequences of tough-minded, of steely-minded decision-making that simply must be taken.

**MRS. HEWES:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**THE SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is rising on a point of order.

### Point of Order Reflections on a Member of Parliament

**MRS. HEWES:** Mr. Speaker, I cite *Beauchesne* 493(4) regarding members exercising "great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply." Likewise 493(3). The hon. Treasurer has made a comment that I consider unacceptable regarding the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada.

MR. DINNING: Just to reply. You know, when I go home tonight and tell my kids that I talked about Madonna, they're going to say, "Dad, you talked about our favourite entertainer." Surely the woman of the year would not think, unless she doesn't like Madonna, which maybe reflects another vintage – maybe she is speaking ill of Madonna. Madonna can't be here to defend herself either. Is the hon. member suggesting that she's a bad entertainer and that we shouldn't be holding her up as a model for Liberal Members of Parliament?

AN HON. MEMBER: Censorship, Bettie? Censorship?

MR. DINNING: Yes. I'm surprised that the hon. member would speak so ill of a recognized entertainer in the business.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair is somewhat at a disadvantage because . . .

MR. DINNING: You don't know who Madonna is.

THE SPEAKER: No. I just heard the term. In any event, we don't really need to characterize other parliamentarians in terms of show business personalities. I think that's probably what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar means. I think all members have to bear in mind a certain amount of caution when they are talking about people who are not in the Assembly.

The Chair is not going to ask the hon. Provincial Treasurer to withdraw, but the Chair is going to admonish all hon. members that they should use caution in this regard with respect to people who aren't here.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I respect your admonition. Maybe I should have spoken of Ethel Merman instead of Madonna, but I won't.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Suffice to say that we have our work cut out for us in federal-provincial fiscal relations. The Liberal government began the task the other day of addressing federal-provincial relations by seriously reducing transfers to some provinces and not to others. We will work with our colleagues across this country to try and make sure that it's a fair and equitable cut, just as we said all the way along: as long as there were major reductions in federal transfers to the provinces, that there was a fair reduction there, as long as they took a meat axe or took a serious cut in their own back yard. Even the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I'm sure, when he rises to respond, will acknowledge that the Liberal government simply did not do that.

When you cut the CBC by 4 percent, when you don't really touch gold-plated pension plans – they cut spending in Alberta on health and postsecondary education and on welfare far greater than this government found necessary to do in its efforts to reduce and eliminate the deficit. Ottawa has chosen to take a different approach. They've cut their spending in the case of postsecondary education by almost twice as much as the provincial government did, at least one and a half times more in welfare, and about one and a half times more in health. I regret that that has happened.

As for the member's motion, I think 'Bowchesnee' at 428(d) would suggest that because this motion was previously refused on March 2, 1994, it's not one that perhaps we should even be debating. As you well know, 'Bowchesnee' suggests that if we've debated and rejected a similar motion or the same motion before,

perhaps we shouldn't do it again. As well, under *Erskine May*, section 16 2 C(1)(j)(ix) and under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 21(1), I would respectfully recommend to my brethren and sisters right, left, and centre to respectfully reject this motion today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise on this, as well, just to comment on some of the Provincial Treasurer's comments. You know, usually the members opposite, the Treasurer and the Premier, are quite, shall I say, crafty in how they approach various strategies with the federal Liberals, as they refer to all the time. But I think this time they really blew it. The Premier gets on *MacNeil Lehrer* and all these other various TV programs advocating cuts. He wants cuts; he doesn't want tax increases. "We've got to cut. Just follow our lead: cut and download." Then when the cuts come, the whining starts. I've had constituents call me up, businesspeople saying: "What the heck are those guys doing? They wanted cuts. We don't even think they've cut enough, and already the cries are coming out. What are they doing? They're being unfair." Well, maybe they are being unfair. The business community, people who bought tickets to those Tory dinners . . .

MR. DINNING: You're defending them; are you?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I'll get to it in a minute. I'll just get to it in a minute. You had your moment. I'll get to it in a minute.

Then we get on to these pension plans. I love this talk about pension plans, those "gold-plated pension plans." We have in this province people running around that formerly served in this Legislature, that brought this government and its fiscal condition to its knees, and they're drawing gross pensions. It was only in the face of losing an election that they withdrew them. Now they're going around in the background, Mr. Speaker, whining that they're not making enough money, and they're out there thinking: how can we increase our pay so that we can go and have a lunch for a thousand bucks?

#### Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair has allowed the hon. Member for Calgary-West to respond to the comments of the Provincial Treasurer, but even the Provincial Treasurer recognized after a while that he had sort of drifted off the subject of the motion in certain areas.

MR. DINNING: And I came back.

THE SPEAKER: And he came back. So therefore, the Chair is now encouraging the hon. Member for Calgary-West to come back to the motion.

#### 3:10

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, in my view the Treasurer unfairly portrayed this issue of pensions. I think it's parliamentary equality that we get to give our side of this issue.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we now have the government scurrying around trying to figure out how they're going to get their remuneration up.

Moving on to the comments about the Deputy Prime Minister. It's almost as though we've got the John Crosbie of the Alberta Legislature. I don't see where that comes into play, but I guess he got a few laughs over there.

Anyway, the tax system, PUITTA. I'd like to keep my comments to this system that was in place, where we had a provincial rebate and a federal rebate. This keeps coming up. The Treasurer brought it up, and I'd like to respond to it. Mr. Speaker, I find this whole discussion – I equate it to the Treasurer sucking and blowing at the same time. On the one hand, they're going around saying: let's cut. Back in 1990 when they were scrambling to balance the budget, it wasn't a problem. Deficit spending: it's manageable. They were scrambling to find revenues. Quick fix: "Let's take that rebate back. The feds are going to keep paying it. They've got the big pockets." And there we are. There are nine of them – and we know who they are, and we'll be mentioning who they are – who voted to withdraw the PUITTA rebate on the provincial side. If you look through *Hansard*, it almost looks like the roles have reversed. I mean, the arguments being brought forward by the Tory side, the government side, at that time were the reverse. The contrary arguments are the arguments that the government is now advancing why the federal government should not be withdrawing this rebate. I've got to hand it again to this government. They are really good at flipping and flopping. You'd think they were seals out there or something.

I mean, let's get this thing in perspective. What happens with the PUITTA rebate? On the provincial side we have TransAlta and Alberta Power, which in 1990 lost those tax dollars, and it was redistributed across the province. The city of Medicine Hat, the city of Edmonton would be net benefactors, supposedly, if the government did a job of respreading those dollars that they saved in that rebate.

Now the federal government is withdrawing their portion and presumably redistributing it amongst the whole country. In theory that's what happens. They say: well, because it's going outside of the province, that's inequitable." Mr. Speaker, we've got letters from TransAlta saying: please reinstate this rebate or the feds are going to withdraw theirs. No answer. We asked the question in question period last spring session: reinstate this rebate or the federal government has no option but to withdraw theirs. Nothing. Now the crying starts. Now the crying starts. "Unfair." After they've been goaded, you know, they just had to respond. We have the Premier running around the country asking that the federal government make cuts, and now the whining starts.

I have no further comments, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Our Provincial Treasurer is quite a guy, but I am losing my patience with him. First, he goes to Ottawa begging the federal Finance minister to protect the rich. Then he stands here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and calls for deeper cuts in program funding. Then in a state of total confusion the Treasurer stands here and complains that Alberta is losing transfer dollars. I don't know if that's dipping and diving or weaving and bobbing or sucking and blowing, but it sure is confusing, and it's confusing to every Albertan as to where this Treasurer stands and why he won't provide this information.

AN HON. MEMBER: Tipping and tripping.

MR. SAPERS: And tipping and tripping, I'm told.

Mr. Speaker, we're in the middle of a series of changes in this country, changes that are going to affect generations to come, regarding the relations between the federal government and the provincial governments of this country. We're in the middle of a remaking of the social contract in terms of health care, social policy, advanced education, to name just a few.

We're on the eve of the creation of a set of national standards, standards that'll be the joint responsibility of all jurisdictions to not only develop but to enforce. It is absolutely critical at this time that we have a look at least, if the government won't let us participate as an opposition, at the reports and the documentation that are going hand in hand with all of these massive changes.

This motion does not ask for much, but it does ask for the fair exchange of what should be public information. It asks for the ability to review and then comment on and then eventually participate in the development of these new standards. As these reforms proceed, I think they're going to have to be monitored closely. I will give the government the benefit of the doubt and say that they want to work hand in hand with the national government, and they want to have the best happen for this province. [interjection] Now, they're sure behaving in a funny way, but I'll give them the benefit of the doubt that that's actually what their intent is. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, is there something in *Beauchesne* that I can use to keep the Treasurer quiet instead of him yakking from his seat? [interjection]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Aren't you his MLA?

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, as the Treasurer's MLA, even though he pretends to live in Calgary, I would like him to know that he has my assurance that I will do everything I can as his representative in this Assembly to make sure that all information is forthcoming so that as we negotiate with the federal government, it'll be not only in his best interest but the best interests of his children and my children and every other member of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to close debate. Oh, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning wishes to participate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak in support of this motion. I think we have to read this motion into *Hansard* to get a grip of what it is we're discussing. Because the Treasurer was the one who initiated a discussion on freedom of information, let's speak about freedom of information. Let's address this motion. This motion states

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing any studies or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government between January 1, 1993, and February 13, 1995, pertaining to reform of federal/provincial fiscal arrangements, including the fiscal transfer system, social policy reform, and the tax collection agreements.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Treasurer is more than comfortable to stand in front of a number of reporters outside of this Assembly and speak to them on this issue. All we're asking for in this motion is: "Please, you've done the studies. You must have, surely. You're feeling comfortable to speak to the press about them. So why don't you put all of them before the public of

Alberta, the 2.7 million Albertans who pay your salary and are rightfully entitled to freedom of information?" This way you can't be in one arena last year, in a new arena this year and making different arguments. There has to be some consistency. Albertans have the right to expect consistency from their government and full information from their government. This motion addresses that very area.

3:20

MR. N. TAYLOR: I wasn't going to join the debate, but when I saw my own rat pack doing so well, I just thought I'd better get up. They have learned well, indeed, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there are any trousers left on the Treasurer anymore, but if he has any dignity with which he's trying to wrap himself, I thought I'd maybe pull the last shred that he might be clutching to his chest before I sit down.

He mentions pensions about my dearly beloved in Ottawa. At least they're going to wait until they are old enough to collect it. We have people like Mr. Bradley, for instance: \$2 million in pension. This is the fellow whose only hobby now is to go out and see how the present environmental minister has ruined this place, cut down all the trees he was sitting in the shade of. How about a young person like Bob Bogle? Old chubbykins from Taber himself, 51 years old. He's got about \$3 million in pensions. Rolling along, you know. At that age you could start a whole new - so for him to start talking about what kind of money is being picked up . . . I won't even mention Dennis Anderson: one-half million. I don't think the minister realizes how much he's contributed to the bad health of these people. With that much money and that little exercise, there's bound to be some overweight come in here. Then we go on to Boomer Adair. At least Boomer's my age, Mr. Speaker. He wrote a book telling all. A \$3 million pension probably before he goes on to his great reward. I feel sorry for him. He at least had the joy of being able to go to Tory functions until he wrote a book, and now I guess nobody's inviting him.

Lastly, he brought up the tax collection agreement. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the government that broke the agreement in 1990 and started pocketing the money that was coming back to be paid to the consumers of TransAlta and Calgary Power, all our utilities. The deal was worked out by his predecessors long before - well, he wasn't even a gleam in somebody's eye at a party. When it was worked out, the deal was an honourable deal. The feds would give back their taxes and the province would give back their taxes: 60 percent, 40 percent of the taxes. Then all of a sudden Little Lord Fauntleroy here and his contemporaries break the agreement and put the money in their pocket and then have the nerve, the audacity, a couple of years later to say: "Look, you can't do that. We might have done it, but after all, this is Alberta. We're allowed to do anything, but you the feds can't." So I'm just absolutely amazed.

I'm glad he gave us that opportunity. Normally he could have been his own somnolent self there in sort of a trance and let this motion go through or let it be killed, but he felt somehow or another that he had to get up and wave his paw. I'm reminded of the mouse full of whisky that, when some was spilled in the bar, got up and waved his fist in the air and said: bring on your damn cat. So he brought the cat on.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a very tough act to follow, and I don't think I'm up to that particular task. So what I'm

going to do is actually focus on the content of the motion, something that the hon. Provincial Treasurer didn't do. My hon. colleagues have shown him the error of his ways, and I doubt very much that he will stray off the path to the extent that he has today.

Actually, it's fortuitous that the motion came up today in light of the federal budget. I think it is fortuitous and I think it's also fortunate that the hon. Provincial Treasurer has accepted the motion. Now, unfortunately, in the context of his discussions he never said whether or not he was going to accept it and provide us with the material. I understand that in fact he now adds as an afterthought that he's going to reject it.

Now, I think, Mr. Speaker, that it's a travesty that the provincial government is not prepared for what is going to happen. They have been given a year's grace in which to plan, in which to figure out how they're going to respond to the cuts. What's more important than the adjustment to the cuts themselves is that the new face of Canada, the fiscal federalism that defines us as an economic union, has to be negotiated. That means we have to know, for example: are we going to shift away from cash transfers, tax points? What is the mechanism? Are we just going to have the federal government as a tax collector? It goes to Ottawa, then it's given back to us. Less comes here than perhaps goes to other regions. Is in fact the vision of the federal government simply as a tax-and-reallocate function, or are there different functions: enforcing national standards in health care, national standards with regards to social assistance, social welfare, with regards to training?

As the government moves from the existing cap in EPF and goes to block funds, the issue then becomes: how do we ensure that we're a country that is integrated, that is an economic union in which there are national standards which define the delivery of certain services that are defined as core services? The Canada Health Act, while it may describe what is to be covered in health care, doesn't define national standards per se, and as the role of the federal government in terms of allocating transfers diminishes, there still is a real role for somehow defining what is common between the provinces. This is going to be even more important, then, as the fiscal role of the federal government diminishes.

So I would hope that the failure of the Provincial Treasurer to come forward with anything that is substantive, other than vaudeville, is not a reflection on the degree of research that has been undertaken in Treasury about what lies down the road, because clearly in the next year and a half to two the face of Canada is going to be redefined in terms of the fiscal linkages between federal and provincial governments.

I will offer one element of criticism of the federal budget, and it's a criticism that I've made of the response to the Provincial Treasurer. You can read the federal document and there is not a discussion or a vision of what Canada will look like five years down the road as we redefine and reallocate our fiscal relationships. That's very much the criticism we have made time and time again against this government in terms of its failure to tell us what Alberta will look like in 1998 after the cuts have been imposed. So I would hope that the Provincial Treasurer, then, is working to define: what is the nature of Canadian fiscal federalism? How are we going to define national standards? What is going to be the mix of cash transfers and tax points? How are we going to ensure mobility rates in the economic union? How are we going to ensure that the halfhearted attempts we've made towards moving towards free trade in goods and services, that we in fact strengthen that and try and strengthen the linkages that define us as a country? Clearly, the role of the federal govern-

ment in defining national standards is going to be of critical importance, and one would expect, then, that the province of Alberta would be at the forefront in offering constructive alternatives as to what national standards are going to be, how they're imposed, and it's clearly something that ought to be debated in this Legislature.

3:30

Again, I hope that the failure of the Provincial Treasurer to come forward with any substantive work is not a reflection of the fact that there is no such work being undertaken, because the next year, year and a half I think is of critical importance as we redefine ourselves as a country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of Motion for a Return 172 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion fails.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:31 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Percy
Bracko	Henry	Sapers
Bruseker	Hewes	Sekulic
Carlson	Kirkland	Soetaert
Chadi	Langevin	Taylor, N.
Collingwood	Leibovici	Van Binsbergen
Dalla-Longa	Massey	Wickman
Dickson	Nicol	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Mirosh
Brassard	Gordon	Oberg
Burgener	Haley	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Havelock	Pham
Cardinal	Hlady	Rostad
Clegg	Jacques	Severtson
Coutts	Jonson	Smith
Day	Kowalski	Stelmach
Dinning	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Magnus	Thurber
Evans	Mar	Trynchy
Fischer	McClellan	Woloshyn
Forsyth	McFarland	Yankowsky

Totals:	For - 24	Against - 42
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[Motion lost]

### Sale of Investments

M173. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies or reports prepared by interdepartmental divestiture committees between April 1, 1993, and March 31, 1994, leading to the sale of the province's investment in Gainers Inc., Alberta Intermodal Services, Northern Lite Canola, and Smoky River Coal Limited.

MR. DINNING: I would cite 'Bowchesnee' 446(2)(o), 446(2)(e), and 446(2)(j) and 'Erskiny' May section 16 2 C(1)(j)(ix) and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act sections 23(1)(f), 23(1)(c), 23(1)(g), and 23(1)(a) as reasons why the Assembly would not accept this motion put forward, and I would so recommend that to all of my brethren and sisters and your colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that we have tried every means open to us - even in public accounts this morning we asked most pointedly that we would like the information regarding mechanisms for the divestiture of certain assets of the province because there has been such a variety of different methods used. One would have thought that in light of the frequent sale of assets by the Crown, there would be either a tendering process or there would be some roster that would be publicly available, some clear criteria as to what the divestiture committees employ in turning to who is going to sell these assets. In some instances there's a tender. In some instances it's done by the department itself. So this is a very straightforward request just for discussion of what the criteria are. The government claims it's transparent. We would just like to see what these criteria are for divesting of the assets which belong to all taxpayers. Even though the taxpayers are not going to receive their money back, they at least would like to know that the mechanism by which these failed assets have been sold is fair and yields the maximum return possible in light of the fact that many of them were bad investments to begin with.

Thank you.

[Mr. Dickson rose]

THE SPEAKER: Unfortunately, hon. member, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has spoken and has closed the debate.

[Motion lost]

### Child Health Services

M175. Mr. Henry moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, summations, or results that were produced by the Department of Health as a result of information collected in the January 25, 1994, memo addressed to superintendents of school districts, directors of private schools, and directors of early childhood services regarding the survey of health services provided for children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to that motion, just a bit of background in terms of this memo and the context. There was a time when school boards and schools in this province took on a fair amount of responsibility for providing health services in the schools to those students who needed it, primarily students with special needs. One of the concerns of educators, school boards, and in fact I believe the government and the opposition has been ensuring that education dollars are used for education, health dollars are used for health, et cetera, et cetera. The government a year and a half ago removed section 39 of the School Act that allowed school boards the option of providing health services at their discretion. At the time the Minister of Health indicated that, yes, indeed, if school boards were not given the mandate anymore to have the option of providing health services to those students who needed it in the school, then the various health authorities, health units, and others would move in to provide those kinds of services.

This survey is linked to that whole context. It was a survey carried out by the department, and the department's never released the results of that survey. I'm asking not for specific information that identifies that a particular jurisdiction responded this way but for copies of reports of summaries from the entire survey.

Thank you. I would encourage all members, in the interests of ensuring an open government and access to information, to support the motion.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the government will reject Motion for a Return 175.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Speaker, to reject this motion for a return without any explanation or without any offer of compromise or rewording indicates to me that either the government collected a pile of information, used a lot of education tax dollars in collecting that information for the Department of Health, and it's still sitting in a box somewhere, and the government's done nothing with it and is therefore wasting dollars that should have been in the school. Either that or the government found something out that they don't want Albertans to know, which frankly is an insult when the government here is moving in a direction of requiring school authorities and school boards to provide more and more information to parents and the public about how the school system is run. One would think that this would be provided in that vein. Or frankly, Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to hide something here. I think it's a black mark on the government's record indeed for them to try to hide this information.

**3:50**

Believe me, this will be of interest, and I will ensure as an elected member that I fulfill my responsibility to every individual who is called upon to complete this survey and to provide and to take time out of their demanding and busy professional schedules and volunteer schedules and who is required to provide this information to the government. The government is either hiding the information or the government doesn't know where it is or the government doesn't know what to do with it.

This, Mr. Speaker, I will also point out, is consistent with the Auditor General's observations of the Department of Education. This information, albeit collected by the Department of Health, was collected from educational authorities for the most part. The criticism of the Auditor General – and I'm paraphrasing here – was very clear that the department collected very significant amounts of information and didn't do anything with it.

If we ask the Department of Education for any sort of indicators in terms of how they made decisions – how do we come up with 4 percent administrations for school boards being the figure the government is imposing on school boards? Is that appropriate? Is that not appropriate? Is that too high? Is that too low? We don't know, because the government doesn't know, because the government, although it has all the information, requires local authorities to expend dollars to collect that information and to send it to them. The government then puts it in boxes and stores it and has no mechanism for determining indeed what the average administration cost in this particular example is for a particular size of school board.

With respect to this specific motion for a return, Mr. Speaker, this government has leveled a grave disservice to children and families of special-needs children. This government and the current Treasurer, when he was the Minister of Education, mandated from on high that we shall have integration at all costs in this school system. Then the local authorities were charged with not only funding that but finding ways to make that work. I commend all players in the education field, but particularly there are some jurisdictions like West Yellowhead and I believe Calgary Catholic that are well known as leaders in their field in terms of inclusive education, and they've done very, very well on that.

Now, one of the problems in that whole desire or that movement to include special-needs children in the mainstream of education is that some of those children need health services in order to be in a school system. The government for a long time, for years, decades, allowed school divisions to use education dollars, dollars that they used to be able to requisition from the local taxpayer to provide those health services. This particular government under our current Premier removed the right of school boards to provide those services. Again, that was in the School Act. They did not mandate that school boards shall but allowed school boards at their own discretion to provide those health services. They are no longer able to provide those health services.

Mr. Speaker, the big letdown has been with the Minister of Health and frankly the Premier for not ensuring co-ordination that when the school boards were no longer allowed to provide those health services to children in order that they may be integrated into the regular school system, as mandated by the previous Minister of Education, then those services would be provided by another publicly funded agency, such as a health unit or directly through the Department of Health.

We have committee upon committee upon committee looking at co-ordination of services. This government has no plan. It's got no direction, and it's got no co-ordination. Mr. Speaker, the tragedy of it all is that children and especially special-needs children in this province are suffering.

Thank you.

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

MR. DAY: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, under 23(i), assuming and imputing certain allegations here, not just as far as having no plan but the previous ones about hiding something. I think the member opposite would have been a wonderful disciple of Joe McCarthy some decades ago in terms of trying to ferret out behind every post and every stone some kind of nefarious reason for something. Speaking on behalf of the minister, who's not here, the reasons are as simple as the fact that this information was collected for internal purposes, and work is not yet completed.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Government House Leader is not allowed to participate in the debate. The Government House Leader was recognized on his point of order. The Chair does not really believe that the types of allegations that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre fall within the purview of the intent of section 23.

[Motion lost]

#### Access Network

M180. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all specific details, terms, and conditions of the takeover and/or sale of Access television network negotiated by the government between July 1, 1993, and February 13, 1995.

MR. THURBER: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I accept.

[Motion carried]

#### Treasury Branches

M181. Dr. Percy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government since January 1992 regarding the feasibility of privatizing the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. DINNING: The government of Alberta has absolutely no intention of privatizing Alberta Treasury Branches, so I would ask the Assembly to reject this motion.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Just a short comment on it. The request was to show any "reports prepared by or on behalf of the government since" 1992, not what the intention of the minister is. I've always sort of been intrigued by the idea of privatizing the Treasury Branches. It's one of those rather unique critters you do not see in the democratic system anymore, sort of a lending agency for the government. You see government controlled banks - and of course, Mr. Speaker, as you know coming from an old-time Social Credit area, the advantage of being a bank is that they can issue many more loans than they have on deposit, whereas the Treasury Branches supposedly can't. I've often thought that another made-in-Alberta bank, a little more competition - something I did agree with old Premier Lougheed on was that we had to move financial centres out to the west here if we were really going to be truly competitive and truly build a western economy.

So I'm disappointed to hear that the minister has no intention of privatizing the bank, but even more so I'm just wondering whether he is doing a little flimflammy here. The question wasn't asking his intention. The question was asking: were the reports prepared? Surely all he has to say is: I have no reports.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to follow with a brief comment after the Member for Redwater spoke, because I recall us being in a similar situation here a number of years ago when I had similar motions for returns asking about privatization papers regarding AGT, and the responses were similar.

The Member for Redwater made an interesting point and said that it would be nice to hear that not only does the Treasurer have no intention of privatizing it, which leaves me feeling somewhat

skeptical because I heard that with respect to AGT in the past - I would like to hear from the government that there were in fact no reports ever done. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that they won't privatize it anyway. When I asked the minister, when we had a minister of technology, research, and telecommunications, for reports regarding the privatization of AGT, I was told there weren't any reports done, which didn't stop the government from privatizing it anyway. So although the Treasurer's answer was mercifully brief and succinct and for once even clear, I would like to have a little bit more information . . .

4:00

AN HON. MEMBER: Misleading.

MR. BRUSEKER: I didn't say misleading. No, not at all.

It would be nice to have a little bit more background with respect to these kinds of decisions, because these are potentially substantive policy directions.

MR. DINNING: Now you want a longer answer?

MR. BRUSEKER: Not a longer answer, hon. Treasurer, but perhaps one that contains more information. There is a substantial difference between a long answer and an informative answer, as I know the Treasurer knows only too well.

So I will just throw out that comment to perhaps the Government House Leader to add a comment or two as he sees fit. But it would be nice to have just a little bit more background to this motion for a return.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Treasurer's response to the previous question that we put forward was transparent. Well, now we've just asked a question of "copies of any studies or reports," and the Treasurer didn't state, as one of my colleagues put it, that there aren't any reports. He just stated that, no, we won't provide them to you. So it leads me to believe that this government operates under selective transparency, and when it suits them, not when it suits the citizens of Alberta, then they will provide the information. This must be an instance where it could perhaps suit Albertans but doesn't suit them.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm very much unclear as to why the Treasurer is not making public a document that the public paid for. Now, certainly there isn't an ulterior motive here. We're asking clearly: provide the document, table it. We're not questioning intention at this time. Perhaps once we review the document, the document that taxpayers paid for, if there is an intention there, then we'll question what are you doing and why are you doing it. This time our request is very plain. It's within the freedom of information, it's in the spirit of freedom of information, so I would only encourage the Treasurer to change his mind on this one.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise today in the Assembly and speak on Motion for a Return 181. I, like the Provincial Treasurer, do not want to see the Treasury Branches privatized. I disagree with the Member for Redwater. I think the Treasury Branches have done a marvelous job over the last little while in Alberta, and I'll stand up and say that anywhere, anytime in this province.

But the motion for a return doesn't ask whether or not the government is planning on privatizing the Treasury Branches. It's merely asking to give us any reports or studies that were prepared by the government for the possibility or feasibility of privatizing the Treasury Branches. That's all it's asking for. If the government clearly isn't interested in privatizing Treasury Branches, as I am not interested in privatizing the Treasury Branches, then surely to goodness they could give us the information that is requested of them.

There has been much talk over the last little while that there were offers coming back and forth on the Treasury Branches from different banks and different institutions in this country, Mr. Speaker. Usually where there's smoke, there's fire, and I'm wondering if the Treasurer isn't hiding behind that smoke right now. So if there's nothing to hide, bring it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Just to add my brief comments. I'm concerned that the Provincial Treasurer, as distinguished a member as he may be of this Assembly, quite misapprehends the new freedom of information Act, and I'm concerned that that may be to some extent driving his resistance to a number of very reasonable requests from my colleagues. I just encourage the member to take the time to read the Act again, because what he'll find is that there is a public interest override. Even information that would otherwise be exempt and not otherwise accessible may still be accessible if the public interest override is invoked by the new Information Commissioner. So I think it's important that the Treasurer understand that.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, is that when myself and the members for Calgary-Shaw and Calgary-Fish Creek and the current environment minister were on the all-party panel, we recognized that the Treasury Branch in many cases in fact was an instrument of government policy and had the potential to be an agent of government policy, not an arm's-length banking institution. Because of that, there's some special treatment in the Act, which I'd encourage the Provincial Treasurer to read. I'm confident that when he does that, he's going to want to in fact provide the information sought, because it's in the interest of Albertans that that kind of information be publicly available.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PERCY: I had paused hoping that the Provincial Treasurer would leap to his feet, Mr. Speaker, so that he would change and clarify his comments, as opposed to being elliptical.

The issue very simply is this, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government has privatized a number of entities of government. It has proposed setting up a number of DAOs. I think that's the acronym this month, as opposed to DROs, et cetera.

MR. BRUSEKER: DOA.

DR. PERCY: DOAs.

They're being set up, clearly, for just transferring functions formerly undertaken by government to the private sector, dealing with issues related to safety, enforcement of standards, et cetera.

There are reviews being undertaken of the heritage savings trust fund. Here we have an entity where taxpayers are collectively responsible for \$8 billion in liabilities, because the fund is self-insured. One would have thought, then, with the agenda of the

government and their perception that the market often is the best way of allocating resources and providing services, that this government would have then assessed the possibility of privatizing the Treasury Branches, looking at the pros and cons, seeing if there were mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, that would allow the Treasury Branches to keep their unique rural characteristics, because why would you want a government banking system centred purely in Edmonton and Calgary.

Frankly, I'm actually just amazed that the provincial government hasn't looked at how to bring the Treasury Branches into the 20th century. What is a way that we can make them a little more cost-efficient, reduce the accumulated deficit, and make them a responsive, aggressive element of financial services available in the province? I think, in fact, that the Provincial Treasurer was not only being elliptical; he was being disingenuous in his response in the fact that there must be a whole array of studies that have been undertaken which he will spring on us in the near future.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of the motion.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

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

**Bill 203  
Family Day Amendment Act, 1995**

[Debate adjourned February 28: Mr. N. Taylor speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry I stood up before the Clerk had finished.

I just had a couple more items to add. I had spoken last time and pointed out that it seems the major reason that this Bill is proposed is one of economics. The argument was that it was costing small business quite a little. What I found interesting, Mr. Speaker – I don't know whether it was mental telepathy or whether I'm communing with the infinite or what, but I got back to the office that afternoon after the debate, and on my desk there was a letter and a petition from the Banff Chamber of Commerce asking that it remain on Monday. In other words, it's economically a good deal to put it away from the weekend because, they said, particularly from Calgary and the member's constituency they come to Banff by the hordes or by the thousands, whatever the right noun would be. The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, while not there to welcome them at the gate, would certainly be very pleased. I'm going to be interested to see how he votes when his own chamber said that this was a good idea, to have it on Monday, and that it was one of the best things to come along. I really bring that out not so much to point out that Banff people are correct, although it's probably a suspicion you might have. Except they do go bonkers every election day and elect the wrong representative.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that if you try to use an economic argument for every person that says you should move it to Sunday because it costs money, there's another group that says you should leave it on Monday because it's making money. Therefore, I think you could take the economic argument and throw it out the window.

## 4:10

All right then; what makes a holiday if you take the economics and throw it out the window? There are definitely two classifications of holidays in this country. One is where it has a particular day all its own, July 1 or Family Day, as we want to call it here, or Good Friday, whatever; that is, holidays that have been proclaimed by our culture and our ancestors. Then there's the other type of holiday: Mother's Day, Father's Day, flower's day, children's day, all the others where you usually just pick a day in order to help promote the cause. Well, I think Family Day is important enough that it ranks; it should have its own day. It should have its own part of the week and not be tagged onto a Sunday, because, as I mentioned, the economic argument isn't there.

Secondly, when one stops to think that we go all the way from New Year's to Easter without a holiday, a break in the middle is right. I used to work a lot in Scandinavia, and they have long, cold winters. The sun quite often almost disappears. They always thought it was very, very important to have one or two holidays in the middle of the winter season just to keep their suicide rate down, because lack of sunshine and the depression that often falls on people in the winter months means that a good holiday in between January 1 and Easter is a good idea.

Now, maybe someday in the future we'll come up with another idea, but right now we already have one. It's called Family Day, and I think it's doing all right just the way it is. I think our forefathers, of which I was one in the Legislature . . .

MR. DAY: What about our foremothers?

MR. N. TAYLOR: And foremothers, forepersons. When our forepersons were gathered here in the Legislature and voted to put Family Day in between January 1 and Easter, I thought it was a good idea, and I'd like to see it stay that way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak in support of Bill 203. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this Bill forward. It emphasizes two principles which I strongly believe in: the importance of recognizing the vital role our families play in the well-being of this province, and the importance of recognizing and acting upon today's fiscal realities.

Few people quarrel with the need for a balanced budget, do not want to pay more taxes, but still many individuals and special interest groups continue to lobby government for status quo or more. This cradle-to-grave mentality must stop. On Thursday last the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark did just that: debating at length status quo, giving us several reasons why we should retain and continue to observe Family Day on the third Monday in February. She even started her comments by warning Albertans to beware of Conservative politicians bearing gifts, because they giveth and then they taketh away. Well, Mr. Speaker, I am a Conservative politician and proud of it. Although not here when the government giveth, I am pleased to be here to debate why we should taketh it away.

[The Acting Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, Family Day in its present form, as a statutory holiday, is not necessary and not consistent with Alberta's current

restructuring and the way government is doing business today. Recent reports in the international financial community confirm that our approach in Alberta is indeed the way to go, that we can no longer have it all, and the time for change is now. In my opinion, it is imperative that our agenda continues to focus on our plan of deficit elimination, balanced budgets, and the orderly pay-down of our debt.

How did we get ourselves in such financial disarray? Alberta is certainly not a poor province. In fact, our revenues this year will exceed \$13 billion. So what went wrong? Basically, as I see it, the difficult situation we now find ourselves in has been caused by the government trying to give everyone everything they want every time they ask for it. Can this be said about Family Day? We built expectations for a life-style, a health system, an education system, a social system, and an economic system that we could not afford and had to borrow to support. We began to spend money we didn't have, to implement legislation that we couldn't afford. Can this be said about the establishment of Family Day?

This must change. If not, generations of Albertans to follow are going to pay a severe price. Addressing this challenge now is not easy and will require some sacrifice from all Albertans. But I clearly see a destination, Mr. Speaker, a destination that indeed involves families, a secure and debt-free future for our province, our children and grandchildren.

In Budget '95 we have taken major steps towards a health system that meets the demands of today's patients and consumers by making better use of resources. Is the continuance of Family Day consistent with that approach? Family Day costs our health system approximately \$7.8 million each year. If you divide that over our 17 regional health authorities, that is an additional cost of \$460,000 to each authority. This figure cannot even be interpreted as the total payroll costs because the nature of health care of course dictates that many employees must continue to work on that day.

Likewise, the same argument can be used in education. The estimated payroll for any given day in February in our schools amounts to almost \$19 million. Again I would argue: how can we support Family Day as a statutory holiday when it adds so drastically to the cost of providing essential services to Albertans?

During her speech the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark said that we've seen downloading onto municipalities, yet not once did she mention how local governments would benefit from a revised status of Family Day. The majority of costs to municipalities are related to the provision of required continuous services to the public. Providing essential services such as police, fire, ambulance, and transit on statutory holidays is expensive and places an additional burden on municipal coffers. In 1989, when the holiday was first implemented, the city of Calgary projected a \$780,000 overtime cost. In January of 1994 officials with the city of Edmonton estimated that their incremental operating costs for each and every statutory holiday average between \$500,000 and \$550,000. Can these dollars not be better spent? I think municipalities would say yes.

Mr. Speaker, besides the costs associated with government, Family Day is a considerable cost to Alberta businesses. Alberta businesses are faced with many of the same fiscal challenges that confront this government. Businesses are trying to do more with less in order to remain competitive in the local, national, and international markets. The added cost of Family Day has done nothing to strengthen their position or help their cause. I believe the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek mentioned that it's been estimated that Family Day costs Alberta's industrial aggregate

well over \$105 million. How can this government count on Alberta businesses to lead the way to economic prosperity while they have a statutory holiday that costs them millions and millions of dollars each year?

During the debate that took place regarding this Bill in August of 1989, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said:

I'd also like to know if the Premier or others in the cabinet have had any discussions about this particular piece of legislation with business organizations, large and small, and what their response to it will be.

Well, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and all present in this Assembly, I would report that organizations such as the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Manufacturers Association in Alberta, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in Alberta, and other business groups did express their opposition to this holiday when it was debated and legislated and that this opposition has remained constant and continues today.

4:20

A recent survey asked Alberta Canadian Federation of Independent Business members whether Family Day should be eliminated as a statutory holiday. Seventy-two percent of their members supported the elimination, stating that the holiday is unnecessary because of the number of other holidays and earned vacation time available to most employees. As well, because many employees are forced to work on Family Day and must be compensated with overtime pay, the holiday represents a great cost to employers in both dollars and productivity. Is it not time to recognize the undeniable merit to their argument and start celebrating Alberta's families instead on the third Sunday in February?

Just briefly I wish to make another point. There is the issue of who gets the holiday and who doesn't. Family Day as a stat is not always welcomed by employers or working Albertans. Many employees have to choose between taking the day off in February or in August. Some Albertans resent the fact that they are forced to take the day off in February while others get the day off in the summer.

All of us in this Assembly are familiar with many Sunday celebrations. I would like for a moment to talk about Mother's Day, a day set aside to pay tribute to our moms. A colleague, who in his former life was a florist and now is a Member of this Legislative Assembly, recently told me that Mother's Day is their single best grossing day in the flower business. Telephone companies and restaurants would attest to the same. Obviously, the general public realize the importance of this day and are quite willing and have done an excellent job of celebrating it. They've done this on their own. They recognize the importance of mothers and motherhood. It has not been government legislated, and they've done it in a fiscally responsible way.

By moving Family Day to the Sunday, Albertans will still be provided with the opportunity to reflect on the importance of the family; to celebrate its strengths, vitality, and meaning; and to work with communities to make a winter celebration one of merit and importance. Family Day on a Sunday is what my constituents want, and it's what I would ask the members of this Assembly to support.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak for a few minutes on this Bill as well. I find that a lot of the discussion

that's going on is bringing up issues that address the concept or the idea of a holiday from very different views. I think all of us in this House recognize that for us, especially those of us that live commuting distance away from our homes, every weekend is a family weekend, because that's when we make our family lives. We have to deal with it in that perspective, unless we can do it by telephone.

The main focus that comes about in reflecting on the issue of a special day for families – and now we see legislation coming up that's going to try and alter the approach that we take to celebrating a day for this concept of family, the feeling of family, the relationship that we have with the people that are close to us in the form of a family.

I listened with great interest to a lot of the debate that came up about, "Well, it's going to save our economic system millions of dollars; it's going to save our businesses the problems that come up with associated overtime." Now we hear the other argument. "Well, gee, it's going to cut short the businesses that have to deal with celebration: the restaurants, the promotions that we get, like all of the other members, from ski resorts saying, 'Well, this is one of our biggest days.'"

I think what we really need to do as a Legislature, rather than single out Family Day as a day that we need to challenge as to whether or not it's valid, whether or not it should be recognized, is look at our whole concept of how we deal with employment relations. We need to look at our labour laws. We need to look at the concept we have that deals with how we focus on remuneration for effort extended. Should people be paid for doing nothing? Should people be paid for holidays?

What we want to deal with is creating in Alberta an Alberta advantage that allows us to compete with the rest of the world, that allows us to have a cost structure for our businesses that is competitive with the rest of the world, that allows our employees, the people who are working in this province, an environment where they feel very comfortable with their working environment, where they have remuneration that's consistent with, quote, a good life, however they as individuals want to define that.

I guess I would like to suggest that maybe the member sponsoring the Bill should have been looking at the idea of how we deal with the issues of pay for holidays, pay for special days. What we should be doing is looking at the idea of having a springtime celebration between the January and Easter time period that we hear talked about where people say, "Gee, let's be a little flexible in our community; let's have a three-day weekend." We can then support the ski resorts. We can then support the tourist-focused businesses. Let's start our week on Tuesday and go through Saturday. Let's have our schools start on Tuesday and go through Saturday. Everybody then gets a three-day weekend. They get to have the celebration. They get the rest that we heard the member talking about so that we don't commit suicide. You know, we have a little flexibility in how we deal with the community.

I'm sure that if we got together in certain communities and had the flexibility within our labour laws, the flexibility within our legislation to deal with defining our work periods, we could have communities that would say, "Gee, let's set aside a three-day weekend as the third weekend in February." Then we can have that break from winter that we talk about, that prevention of suicide that was referred to. We can have the kind of economic benefit that comes with people going out and being tourists for a little while. So we need to start looking at this kind of an approach to vacations and this kind of an approach to holidays.

I think it's great that we specify certain days for recognition of certain attributes of our society, like Mother's Day and Father's Day and Family Day and all of the others we have that are

recognized. Let's say this day is – we stand up and recognize that function or that process in our society, and we can do that in many ways. We've heard a lot of arguments in connection with specifically Family Day and how we can deal with it from the perspective of a celebration on Sunday. We don't need to have, quote, an economic disadvantage created by having a celebration. Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree; we shouldn't be having economic disadvantages. But we should be dealing with these from the perspective of how flexible are we in terms of creating that environment where we really have an economic advantage to the businesses that operate in our province, both from the perspective of competing internationally and drawing from the international market for celebration times.

So I think what we need to do is look at this Bill as maybe one step, but it also has to be kind of the take-off point for a real look at how we deal with all of our relationships between employment and business, between our social concepts of celebration and the remuneration concepts. We need to be much more flexible, and we need to deal with them from the perspective of what's best for everybody involved, rather than looking at it on a very short run and a very issue-specific type of change, which we're dealing with here in terms of this Bill on Family Day. I think this is a start that we need to look at, but it's something that we need to take much further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to rise today and speak to this Bill. I'm speaking to it wearing several hats again, which is sort of my trade these days: first of all as the chairman of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families; and second of all and probably most important, as someone who belongs to a family. I think that's critical.

I'd just like to start off my comments by commending the previous speaker on what he had to say. He actually said a lot of the issues and brought forward the issues of the workplace, which are really the most predominate when it comes to the family. It is not whether we have a Family Day, it is not whether we have a holiday, and it is not the economic rewards; it's what does the workplace do to the family. I think the previous speaker raised some very good points.

4:30

As I've been sitting here, I've been listening to the arguments that have been put forward. A lot of the arguments have dealt with essentially two things and missed a very important third. The two things that have been dealt with are, one, the economic consequences of Family Day. We all know what they are. It costs the hospital in Brooks, where I'm from, around \$40,000 a year to have Family Day as a holiday, and that certainly does have some economic consequences in this time of restraint. The second issue was raised by the Member for Redwater, when he stated: essentially, we need a day off; you know, it's kind of snowy out and cold, and we need a day off in February. That one I have a little tough time with. I think the issue that is missing from the debate is the whole issue of families. What this was brought in for was Family Day, and Family Day was a day that people were supposed to spend with their families. It was supposed to strengthen the family. It was supposed to put forward family values. I think, Mr. Speaker, what we have seen in the debate in this Legislature is probably the best reason why Family

Day should be moved to a Sunday. It has been taken over by economic consequences and people wanting a day off.

If we want to do something about the family, let's do it, and there are lots of suggestions out there. I'd like to start off with a poll commissioned by the Canada committee on the International Year of the Family that was done by Angus Reid and brought forward some very interesting statements on the family. I had the opportunity of talking specifically to the chief pollster who did this. He said that he got the information in front of him, he sat down on his front room rug, as he normally does when he brings in all the information, and he couldn't believe what it said. He went over it two or three times, and he said that he just could not believe what this poll said.

To put it very briefly – and probably the biggest thing that I can put it down to is a whole perception gap. It's myth versus reality, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important thing when it comes to our families. First of all, 63 percent of the people polled – this was a large poll of over 2,000 across Canada – felt that the family was in crisis. They said that the family is in trouble; there's absolutely no doubt about that. Interestingly, though, 75 percent of the people said: "But my family is fine. We're happy. I have a good life. I have a good family. It must be the people down the street who close their doors all the time and shut their windows. They're the ones that are in crisis. It isn't our family." I think this puts forward the very strong fact that families are not in crisis across Canada.

The other thing that I would like to say is that of the 63 percent who said that families were in crisis – I'd like to give you the reasons. First of all, the rate of divorce and instability of the family unit, 28 percent; financial difficulties, 15 percent; lack of values in society, 18 percent; violence and crime, 13 percent; and unemployment, 12 percent. Mr. Speaker, I have no idea how an extra holiday in February is going to change any of those perceptions or any of those problems in the family, and I think that's what we have to focus on. Basically, Family Day is not going to change those things. We have to take other methods.

There are some other very interesting things that occur, and there have been a lot of studies that have been done on this across Canada. One of them was to go out and ask the workers who are members of the family what the problems are: how could your employer help you to balance your work and your family? Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just give you a bit of a rundown on this. Around 25 percent said they wanted flexible work hours – that's so they could spend more time with their family – increased family leave, on-site day care, supervisor understanding, shorter hours, work at home, part-time work, job sharing, with day care subsidies being the last one they talked about, at about 6 percent. An extra holiday in February was not on that list. It is not going to help the family. That was from 500 employed mothers, and 340 employed fathers were asked the same question. Again, work at home – 20 percent said that would help – flexible work hours, supervisor understanding, on-site day care, increased family leave, shorter hours, increased pay, and fitness facilities: these are what the workers identified as ways to make their families stronger. It was not Family Day. It was not a holiday in February because it's cold out. That did not do it, and I think there's a lot of evidence to show that.

May 15 of every year is the International Day of Families. The United Nations put forward what they felt was important for families, and, Mr. Speaker, do you know what? It did not include a day off in February. I find that hard to believe, but it's actually true. This is what they, the United Nations, said. What they did

say and basically what they were trying to put forward is that governments should be pro family. If you want to help someone, you've got to recognize that the family is an incredible organization that's at the heart of our society, and you must treat it as such.

They even put forward some suggestions for observance of Family Day, and I'd like to just read some of them.

- Collaboration between Governments and other sectors of society in planning national activities to reach large numbers of people;
- Commitment and active engagement on the part of non-governmental organizations known for their substantive expertise, organizational potential and grass-roots outreach;
- Family or community forums and panel discussions, where families and their members can explore issues [that affect them];
- Special family fares or free "family tickets" on public transportation to give additional emphasis to the Day;
- Coverage of the Day's events by the news media.

I think that could either be a plus or a minus. I'm not sure on that one.

The Day can also be used as a news peg for feature stories on family-related issues;

- An exhibition of posters, photos, books or other items . . .
- Involvement of marginalized or lonely people in the Day's events;
- Friendly competition.

Mr. Speaker, again the United Nations did not mention a holiday in February in what they put forward. They felt that that was not a critical part of how to help families on a family day. It was not to make it a statutory holiday but instead make it an internationally recognized day on May 15.

I think these are extremely important issues if we actually want to call something a Family Day. Do we want to help families, or do we want a holiday? Do we want to save money, or do we want a holiday? Or do we want to help families? Mr. Speaker, Family Day is not the way to do it. I think the members who have spoken about the financial implications are all true. I think the member who spoke about wanting a holiday because it's cold out spoke from the heart. But none of them have spoken about the importance of the family and what the family means.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, in my job as chairman of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, the Premier's council is due to disband on July 1 of this year. I'd like to give you a little bit of background as to how that occurred, because I think it is relevant in this discussion.

Mr. Speaker, we sat down with our board and we said: "You know, it's time that the state got out of the family. We've given it a good start in the International Year of the Family, but it's time that we got out. It's time to turn the baton over to families to allow them to control their own destiny." No longer is the state needed to say: well, your family structure is this or your family structure is that or you need a day off in February. What we decided was that the most important thing we could do was to turn it over to the families and allow them to control their own fate. I think that's an important and a very positive step that our Premier's council took, and I really commend the members and the board members who made that important commitment.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak on a personal note right now. What happened this morning was that my assistant in my constituency office had a family day. What she had today was a true family day because her son called, he was sick at school, and I gave her the day off. Now, that is what Family Day is all about. It's not about a holiday in February. It's not about economics.

It's not about needing an extra day just for doing nothing. It's about families, and a holiday in February doesn't make a particle of difference to families.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:40

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are in effect, as I've heard it, two different issues being debated in the context of this Bill. The one issue is how we celebrate families in Alberta. The second issue is whether we should have a holiday during the week in February. Two really quite severable issues, both of them important issues to Albertans, and it is difficult, as the last speaker has said. In one debate we sort of vacillate back and forth between the two issues.

In terms of how we celebrate and promote families, I'm a bit surprised at the last speaker, that he's still trying to find the connection between Family Day and a celebration of the family. I start from the assumption that there is none, that the designation is wholly an arbitrary one. I think all members in this Assembly recognize full well that the way you celebrate families, the way you nurture and promote families has nothing to do with a point on the calendar. It has everything to do with Head Start programs, with programs for the parents who are substance abusers, parents that can't manage their anger, access to mediation services for families in crisis. That's the sort of way we start addressing families and start finding some way to be able to promote families. Early childhood services, Head Start programs, child access enforcement laws and programs so that after divorce and separation children can enjoy the benefit of their full extended family: those are things that we'd talk about if we were focusing on how we promote families.

On the second thing: should we have a holiday during the week in February? Well, I believe we should have a holiday during the week. I'm voting against this particular Bill, and I am for two reasons, Mr. Speaker. The first one is that I think, frankly, that Albertans do want a holiday during the week in those long days of winter, and I understand the last speaker suggested there was little value in that. But I think any of us that have grown up in Alberta and lived our lives here don't have to see a statistic, don't need a survey to tell us that for many people this is the toughest time of the year, that long stretch between Christmas and springtime. For people concerned about the morale of Albertans and giving them a break, I think that's a compelling reason. I don't need statistics and I don't need dollar sums to tell me that that's a compelling reason, and that's certainly one of the reasons that I support a holiday during the week and am opposed to the Bill.

There's also been a lot of talk about the economic impact. I note that the Member for Lacombe-Stettler – she had some statistics – talked about the cost to Alberta businesses. She talked about the cost to the city of Calgary in terms of overtime costs. You know, Mr. Speaker, there's some other compelling statistics she didn't talk about. In the city of Calgary in Calgary-Fish Creek constituency we have a whole other industry that is hugely advantaged by that one day off in February. In Calgary-Fish Creek the total revenue from the tourist visitor industry – involving retail, food service, accommodation, transportation, attractions, and recreation – is \$20 million. Now, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek may think that's small potatoes – in fact, it involves in her constituency 490 employees – but consider my constituency, the area I represent. In Calgary-Buffalo the tourist

sector represents \$249 million; that's annually. That includes \$17 million in provincial taxes, \$13 million from Calgary-Buffalo in municipal taxes and in Calgary-Buffalo alone, direct and indirect costs related to the tourism industry, and 6,070 jobs.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I can't ignore an industry as important as tourism and the associated industries in downtown Calgary. So when I consider the various factors in how I'm going to vote, I'm mightily impressed with those numbers and with that enormous impact on my constituency. I'm happy to share with any of my colleagues from Calgary, if they're interested, the kind of impact that the tourist visitor industry has on each of those constituencies. I think that is a compelling statistic we have to look at as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think I had assured my caucus colleagues I was going to be brief, because I know there are many that wish to speak, but for those reasons I will be voting against this. I recognize that there are strong views and legitimate views on both sides of the question. But I think both on an economic basis and, as well, just in terms of quality of life, which doesn't so readily translate on balance sheets and in statistical information, Albertans will be best served by retaining this holiday, although I take to heart the comments from Lethbridge-East because I think my colleague did make some very thoughtful suggestions, as he's wont to do, in terms of how we can move forward and create a genuine and an ongoing economic advantage here through a more careful strategy in terms of dealing with vacations.

Thanks very much, sir.

**THE ACTING SPEAKER:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**MR. EVANS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to have an opportunity to participate in this debate today, and I'll try to be to the point and brief in my comments. I'll begin by saying that I will not be supporting Bill 203, but I'll move on from that to thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this Bill before the House, because I think what most speakers are talking about here is getting to the root of what Family Day is all about and what families are all about and what recognition of the important things in life is all about.

Quite frankly, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has given all of us, and I think Albertans generally, an opportunity to consider this issue and to put it in perspective. I must say that I have opinions on both sides of the issue in my constituency. I've heard from some of my constituents in the eastern part of Banff-Cochrane who are living in country residential areas just outside of the city of Calgary. Some of them do support the holiday. Others take the view that has been espoused by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, that this is an expensive holiday and it does not have merit.

I have also the opposite view, and a very passionate view, in the area of my constituency in the Bow Corridor and into Banff national park, the townsite of Banff, and Lake Louise, where the tourism industry is the major game in town, where those constituents of mine, either directly or indirectly, make their livelihood thanks to the tourism industry.

So I have had, as I say, a number of comments made on both sides of this issue. I recall that back in 1989, when this Bill was passed, I received innumerable cards in my office stating that this was a terrible, terrible intrusion to the workers of the province of Alberta and was going to cause untold problems. But like many things, over time people tend to look at things with a little broader perspective and without pointed emotion. I think, quite frankly,

Albertans have in many cases changed their view about the benefits of Family Day.

Just on a lighter note, Mr. Speaker, I was reminded, when I reread the hon. sponsor's initial comments on this Bill, that it came into being on my birthday in 1989. So, in point of fact, how could I oppose a Bill that came into effect on my birthday? When I think of this past Family Day and the absolutely spectacular weather that we had in Banff-Cochrane constituency and in the city of Calgary, 17 above, it makes me feel that even the gods are in favour of Family Day.

**4:50**

But getting back to a serious note, Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the comments by the Member for Lethbridge-East, and I think all of us who participate in the democratic process as members of the Assembly and live considerable distances from our families and our homes recognize the demands on time and the inability to really participate on a regular basis with our families. My family lives in Canmore. They have no desire to leave Canmore; they absolutely love the area and the people who live there. That means that my time with my family is essentially some time on Friday, a bit on Saturday after I've attended to my constituency responsibilities, and then Sunday, which is my family day. It's never a full family day, though, because we are all planning for the beginning of the next week when we enter into that family day.

I know for me personally, having that ability to have a day in February when there is dedication to Family Day – albeit that many people around the province, including my own constituents, like to try to find something for me to do on that day to take me away from my family, I've been religious in avoiding that and explaining to them that I respect the integrity of the genesis of this holiday, that I think it is important and I want to personally spend the time with my family. I also see that happening with many others who come into my constituency and enjoy the opportunity to spend some time in a casual way with their families.

You know, there is some merit to a holiday in February as opposed to spring, summer, and fall holidays in terms of bringing attention to the holiday and keeping families together. Because let's face it, folks: February in Alberta, notwithstanding this past year, is normally not the best time of the year weatherwise. Now, we don't have the demands on our time such as cutting the grass, watering the garden, and doing all of those wonderful outdoor activities that generally move people away from their families and to their friends and acquaintances. Those kinds of demands, generally speaking, aren't there in February, so there is more of an opportunity for families to spend time together. And they don't all have to come to my constituency in Banff-Cochrane to spend it. They can spend it in their homes; they can spend it in their communities. A number of communities are becoming more aggressive in terms of creating opportunities for families to spend time together without incurring cost, and I certainly applaud that.

I think we have to, though, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo mentioned, differentiate between the two important aspects that were made in the discussions we've been having here: the one, the family itself, and two, the economic side. Just for a moment I want to give you some views of some of my constituents, the Banff/Lake Louise Tourism Bureau for example. They have done some examination of the positive impacts of this holiday in Banff-Lake Louise, and they are literally one hundred percent occupied, Mr. Speaker, over this entire weekend. It's not just one day. We're not just talking about Family Day. In February, when the tourism industry, which is one of the foundations of our economic

engine, is not operating at full steam – generally, occupancy is below 50 percent – we have this wonderful weekend called Family Day for all three days, the Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and into Monday as well, and we have one hundred percent occupancy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

What does that generate? Well, in the Banff-Lake Louise area it is generating something in the magnitude of \$1.4 million, and the multiplier effect of that is about \$3.4 million. That's significant money, Mr. Speaker, that is going into business in this province, but it's only an example of where tourism dollars are being generated. Those who understand the tourism industry in this province will recognize that Edmonton and Calgary are the two biggest areas in terms of the tourism industry in this province. So there are substantial benefits, as well, being realized in both of those communities and, I would daresay, in other smaller communities throughout the province of Alberta as well.

This past Family Day I was able to spend some time in my community, in Canmore, and also in Banff. I spent some time skiing as well on that weekend, and I saw happy faces. I saw families spending time together in a relaxed environment, not stressed by the need to consider getting on the highway and getting back to their places of work for the next day but actually enjoying an extended time together.

Mr. Speaker, I would very strongly recommend to members of this Assembly that we consider this matter in greater detail. I think we have to question the statistic of a \$35 million cost to Albertans on this day. I don't think we should accept that at face value. By the same token, I think the economic benefits that come to the retail side of our economy, that come to the tourism side of the economy should be calculated and should be documented well so that all Albertans will be able to consider what the economic benefits and disadvantages are. But in the situation on Family Day, when tourism operators are happy to pay two and a half times the normal wage because they are making so much more money than they would normally make on that particular day, it seems to me that everybody is the happier: number one, the employer who's making better money; number two, the employee who's making up to two and a half times what that employee would normally make; and number three, all of the people who are taking the day off, who are benefiting from the service that's being provided by those employees.

So I would like to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that while I am not going to be supporting this Bill, I think it's an important Bill to have been brought before this Legislature. I think we should take the time to investigate the economic benefits and disadvantages of this. I think we should spend more time recognizing the social benefits of this day and the opportunity to spend time with our families and to focus on what I think is extremely important if we in Alberta are going to continue to have that Alberta advantage which includes, to a very significant degree, quality of life. And I think we owe it to Albertans to give them an opportunity to tell us as legislators what their opinion is. Therefore, I'm going to suggest to hon. members that this would be a very good issue to put on a referendum going into the next provincial election. Not a side issue so that we spend a tonne of money on it, but put it down as a question on the ballot at the next provincial election. Let Albertans tell us what they want to do with their Family Day.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin my comments by saying that in my home every day is a family day, and I really resent that this holiday has evolved into a commercial argument where some families win and some families lose. Who loses most in this argument is the basic family unit itself, I believe, because we've created inequities with the system that we've got.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane just talked about religiously keeping this holiday for his family. Well, that's a privilege that many families in this province can't indulge in. Many families have no option but to work on this day or to keep their businesses open, regardless of what their personal beliefs are. We have families who actually have to put in their eight hours in the shop and arrange for day care at additional cost because it's a statutory holiday. We have families who own businesses who have to pay time and a half for people who work and a regular day's wages for those people who are not working that day, and for small businesses that has a very significant economic impact. There are very significant consequences in dollar value to marginal businesses who are employing people, and in this economic climate we have to make sure they are able to employ themselves and people.

5:00

I've recently seen a survey here that speaks specifically to eliminating Family Day as a statutory holiday, and there was not a single business sector in this survey who felt that this day should be kept as a statutory holiday. You would think that in a provincewide survey of small businesses, there would be a couple of assumptions that you would expect to happen. You could expect, I believe, that economic sectors that belong to tourism industries or hospitality industries would agree to keep this as a statutory holiday, but in fact that's not at all what happened here. In this survey nearly 90 percent of those people in the hotel/motel food and beverage industry recommended that this holiday be eliminated. So what that means is that 90 percent of the businesses in this industry are being hurt by this holiday and I would expect being economically hurt by this holiday and that it is only a financial advantage to 10 percent of the businesses. That's something I think we have to keep in mind here.

You would think that there would be an assumption that in this survey some of the businesses in specific regions would be very friendly to having this holiday. Like the Member for Banff-Cochrane, who is in a heavy tourism industry region, you would expect that those businesses in that specific sector would agree to keep the family holiday as a statutory holiday by a huge majority. In fact, they didn't either. The majority there also agreed that it should be eliminated as a statutory holiday. In this survey 80 percent of retail businesses agreed that it should be eliminated; 70 percent of agriculture businesses said that it should be eliminated. In fact, the least number of businesses who supported eliminating it were in the financial insurance and realty area, in that field, and even there 57 percent of the businesses believed that this day should be eliminated as a statutory holiday. So I think we've heard many arguments in here that there's a lot of economic viability for sectors in this province to keep this day as a statutory holiday, but I don't think that the figures actually hold that out to be true. These results certainly don't support keeping this holiday from a financial perspective.

Then we get back to the argument about supporting this holiday based on families being able to celebrate together. But we've

seen that the reality is quite different here, that time after time after time particularly those families who would want to spend the time together cannot because they're in a position where they cannot take the day off work or they cannot tell their employer that they cannot be there, whereas a small marginal business cannot have their doors closed for that day. They're not competitive in that environment, and either their own family has to work it or they have to get some of their employees to work it.

So I really believe that Family Day should be celebrated in the same way that we celebrate Father's Day and that we celebrate Mother's Day and with the same respect that those two days are given. I do not believe that Family Day has that kind of respect in this province at this time. For that reason I'll be supporting this Bill.

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**MR. DUNFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm short, and I'll try and make this speech short and direct. First of all, I believe that Family Day is every day. Secondly, I want to say that I'm for this Bill because I'm against the observing of Family Day on the Monday.

My reasons are these. I believe that there are five of them. One is that it's terribly damaging to individual productivity, especially to those folks who are earning a living based on commission only. Two, it's damaging to the companies themselves who are trying to provide goods and services, especially in a short month that reduces that productive time for them. Third, it will remove once again a springboard for the union. The union does not have to collectively bargain for a family day technically, because if it's already in the Employment Standards Code, it's almost a given. So we have to make sure that unions bargain for what they get. The fourth point: it is unfair in the sense that not everyone's covered.

My fifth and final point – and I would want to have this at the top of the list – is that when you have general holidays such as this, you have pay for time not worked. Now, there's no good acronym for that. It comes out like 'pooft-newf' or something. But I want to detail for the Assembly that this is highly expensive time. It does not matter whether the rate of pay is \$5 or \$10 or \$50 an hour. When you pay for time not worked, you get nothing back from it. Here are some of the things where you get pay for time not worked: grievance activity, downtime due to system shutdown, late start-ups, early quits, extra coffee breaks, additional rest periods, vacation time, and then finally the stat and general holidays. Tremendously expensive. We've got to get rid of it.

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**MR. BRACKO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a little taller, so I'll be a little longer than the previous member. I want to thank members on both sides, my colleagues, for their input in the debate on Family Day. I think it's very important that we have this debate and get a better perspective of the total picture.

Family Day, people have said, is a day off. I like to take it to the positive side: it's a day on, a day on with your family. Families are very important, the backbone of our community. After being in education 25 years, 35 years in camping, 35 years volunteering in the community, I realize the value of the family and the importance of the family. First of all, where there's functional families, everyone benefits. Where families become

dysfunctional – and we all do at times of crisis – we have to have the support and the strength of others around us.

We look at the roots of the family. In St. Albert, my own community, the roots were started by the oblates, the Grey Nuns, and their purpose was to support and strengthen families. This has continued in St. Albert. It's very important that we have roots so that we know where we've been, so that we know where we want to go. With the tremendous changes in society – technology, values, and so on – the family has to adjust and become stronger. I guess I'm concerned about the government's position. They don't support full kindergarten. Some members are against reading and now against motherhood with the taking away of Family Day and making it into an ordinary day.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's a free vote. It has nothing to do with the government. It's a private member's motion.

**MR. BRACKO:** Thank you.

During the oil boom days of the '70s Alberta prospered. Everyone was making a fortune. Everyone benefited. The economics were tremendous. People could quit their jobs, go to Hawaii for six months, come back and get another job that easily. Yet during those days, Mr. Speaker, Alberta led North America in teenage suicides. We realize from that that parents were busy making money instead of spending time with their children, their families. Money was more important than their children. Have we made the almighty dollar more important than our families? That's a question we have to ask ourselves, whether it's economics, whatever we do. Even if we have more money in the bank, I guess the question we ask is: how much do we leave behind when we die? The answer is: we leave everything behind. What we take with us is our family, our family values, what we've contributed to our families and the community around us.

I have a very special friend and mentor, who was very successful in the business he was in, a very important community leader. This happened not too long ago. In the last few months of his life here we had a meeting for about an hour and a half and just shared. He said: "Len, the only really important thing in life is our families." He spent his last months strengthening his family ties, becoming a listener, and supporting and strengthening his family. So I say: let's put our families before the almighty dollar and keep Family Day. I believe that recognizing that special day is a start to having healthy families. In St. Albert it's becoming more of a tradition. More families are doing things together, and it's benefiting a complete community.

So let's go back and let's keep this as a special day: a day on, not a day off. Let's look beyond the economics of it to the really important things in life and defeat this motion.

**5:10**

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister responsible for Economic Development and Tourism.

**MR. SMITH:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great opportunity for me to stand up on this important private member's Bill to look at both the merits of keeping this holiday, that exists only in Alberta, or in fact becoming consistent with the balance of the country.

The concerns that come up about the cost of maintaining the Family Day holiday are important. Opponents argue that the holiday is unnecessary given the extent of other statutory holidays. The day adds a significant burden to payroll costs, as we've heard from the member from Lethbridge. By law employers are

required to pay full-time staff for the day off or pay overtime for those staff that have to work. In fact, in a previous life that was in effect what we had to do. In a family-owned business generally the members of the family spend Family Day at the place of work.

The proponents of Family Day argue that the ever increasing time people spend in the workplace is undermining the family, that in the long run the negative social repercussions of working parents are more detrimental to society than the cost of retaining the holiday. In fact, in the global marketplace, Mr. Speaker, the rush to competitiveness, I think, more than overrides our emotional discussion with respect to Family Day.

However, there are certain sectors, Mr. Speaker, tourism and travel, that benefit from Family Day. In fact it's a February long weekend that generates significant revenue to these sectors and, in fact, generates significant revenues to specific constituencies represented here. The 1991 Alberta resident travel survey indicates that Albertans took 472,600 trips and spent \$28.5 million during the three-day weekend that year. Compared to other long weekend holidays, Family Day had the second lowest expenditures. In fact, Christmas, where everybody is closed, was the lowest.

I think it's important to look at the trips of a long weekend and the expenditures that were calculated: Family Day, \$28.5 million; Easter, \$44.8 million; Victoria Day, \$30.8 million; Canada Day, \$34.9 million; August civic holiday, \$31.7 million; Labour Day, \$32.4 million; Thanksgiving, \$31.2 million; Christmas, \$23.2 million; and New Year's, interestingly enough, \$126 million. When we compare travel expenditures of the Family Day weekend in 1991 with normal weekends between November and April, it is apparent that although Family Day does create more expenditures than a normal weekend, the increase on daily expenditure business is minimal: \$67 per day versus \$65 per day.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister responsible for Economic Development and Tourism, but

under our Standing Order 19(1)(c) I must now put the question on the following motion for consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

head: **Consideration of His Honour  
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Moved by Mr. Brassard:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable Gordon Towers, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Motions  
Address in Reply to Throne Speech**

16. Moved by Mr. Evans on behalf of Mr. Klein:

Be it resolved that the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

MR. BRUSEKER: Is this not a debatable motion?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Not that the Chair is aware of.

[Motion carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

