

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, February 28, 2000**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 00/02/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, after the prayer please remain standing.

On this day let us be guided by Your eternal wisdom and confidence that You believe in all of us. Amen.

Hon. members, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mr. Lorieau is in the Speaker's gallery.

O Canada, our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all thy sons command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 220 Albertans. They are asking

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a bill banning private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

This brings the number of petitions submitted so far to 653.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition signed by 258 people from Edmonton and the surrounding area urging the Legislative Assembly to "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased today to rise and table petitions signed by 255 Edmontonians.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the public health care system].

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

This petition has been signed by over 273 Edmontonians and brings the total today to a great number.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care [in the province].

This is on behalf of 214 residents of Edmonton and area.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the public health care system].

This is signed by 252 Edmontonians and is the last of five petitions submitted today with the great number being a total of 1,252 for today.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled the other day regarding private health care and public health care please be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would request that the petition which I presented in this Assembly on February 24 signed by hundreds of my constituents in protest of the government's plans to privatize health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now request that the petition I presented on February 24, last Thursday, signed by several hundred Albertans calling on the Assembly to ban private, for-profit hospitals be read and received now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a Standing Order 40 application.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice now that immediately after the daily Routine I will move as follows:

Be it resolved that this Assembly affirm the importance of open access to reading material by recognizing February 27 to March 4, 2000, as Freedom to Read Week.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

**Bill 6  
Special Payment Act**

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Special Payment Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is enabling legislation to allow the Workers' Compensation Board and certain widows to enter into negotiations.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

**Bill 9  
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in keeping with our commitment to open and accountable government, I'm happy to table today in accordance with the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the fiscal year ended March 31, '99.

It's also my pleasure to table on behalf of the government caucus a number of reports entitled Allowance and Travel Expenses for the 12 months ended March 31, '99. These reports are accompanied by copies of personal expense claims, copies of capital residence allowance claims, and copies of vehicle expense claims. I'm pleased to report that this is a comprehensive list of expenditures including all 12 months for the fiscal year ended March 31.

I'm also pleased to table the report on the general revenue fund, details of expenditure by payee, everything you always wanted to know about every dime of government spending, right here, and where it went. Unlike the federal government we keep track of our expenses, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table answers to Motion for a Return 205 regarding inventory of oil field wastes in Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table five copies of the responses to Motion for a Return 207 and Motion for a Return 209, accepted on April 28, 1999.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of answers to questions asked regarding Alberta Health and Wellness supplementary estimates on December 1, 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to table two reports. The first report is from Donna Wilson, who's a professor in the Faculty of Nursing, University of

Alberta. It's entitled Regional Health Planning and Delivery in Alberta: A Basic Cost-Benefit Analysis in Response to a Health System Performance Issue as presented to the standing policy committee. What it indicates is that a cost-benefit analysis is required and a more in-depth appraisal of regionalization before the regional health authority boards assume responsibility associated with contracting out major surgery to for-profit firms, the same like the Treasurer. It is also concerned that the funds which were used to build and are now used to sustain a regional health system are not available for direct patient care.

The second study is a study by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward which is entitled Private Profit or Public Good: The Economics and Politics of the Privatization of Health Care in Alberta. It indicates that for several decades and in various countries private, for-profit health care has been shown to consistently fall short of nonprofit and publicly provided health care and that when compared to publicly provided health care, private, for-profit health care typically costs more.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. Blyth Irvine, who is a constituent of Castle Downs. He has written the letter because he has experienced firsthand what the health care system is like in Britain, which includes both private and public health care, and he is in full support of the initiative that the government is taking on.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling the appropriate number of copies of a speech by Dr. David Schindler. Dr. Schindler is the world's most distinguished freshwater ecologist and one of Canada's most honoured scientists. This is a speech he gave on February 9 of this year entitled The Urgent Need for Endangered Species Legislation in Canada, in which he criticizes the provincial government for their lack of effort in this regard.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a project description: Making Justice Accessible, women's access to legal services. The project is sponsored by Women Looking Forward, an organization in Calgary, and it's described here in their February 2000 newsletter, which is also filled with all kinds of other useful and necessary information.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a report concerning investigations conducted by the Ombudsman on injured workers, and it contains five recommendations on how they could be improved.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the program on the investiture of lifesaving honours which were conducted today at Government House and presided over by the Hon. Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings to make. The first one is copies of a letter that I've just had delivered to the Premier's office requesting the Premier to intervene on behalf of Leticia Cables, who'll be leaving the country tomorrow at 11:45 unless the deportation order is rescinded. So I have requested the Premier in writing to intervene as quickly as he can.

Mr. Speaker, my second set of tablings is three in one bunch. They deal with privatization of health care and the economics of contracting out public health services. The first tabling is the executive summary of the study by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward, *Private Profit or Public Good: The Economics and Politics of the Privatization of Health Care in Canada*.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the keynote address delivered by Professor Robert Evans, professor of economics, the University of British Columbia. The title of the paper is *The Role of Private and Public Health Care Delivery in Alberta*. This paper was delivered at the health forum sponsored by the Alberta Congress Board.

The third set is consumer experience with contract surgery and private clinics in Alberta, a study done by the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, and released just a little while ago.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the other tablings, there's a letter that I received from Dale Henkel of Trochu, Alberta, expressing his deep concern about the rising costs of fuel and the impact of it on farmers in this province.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, deals with the Spray Valley area development. Both Bonnie Nasim and the other writer – the name is here; I can't find it at the moment – are opposed to the development of Spray Valley and are asking the government to take action to stop that development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a report called *Budget Highlights*. It's done by Nesbitt Burns, as you know a very reputable financial firm, and it praises our moves to clear the net debt, pay down the remaining debt and gives positive words on ensuring that Albertans pay the lowest taxes. It also gives positive points for the government taking "a balanced approach in this . . . budget, offering up both tax reductions and increased social spending." I'll table those copies.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair would like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Red Deer-South requesting that Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to the Committee of the Whole on Wednesday, March 1, 2000.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today for the information of all members of the Legislative Assembly a press release from Georgia-Pacific dated August 18, 1997, in which they express a willingness to compensate homeowners for exterior hardboard siding which absorbed moisture and rotted prematurely in America.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a very large group of grade 6 students from Westlock, Alberta,

which is in the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock. They are seated in both the members' and public galleries and are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Dan McDonald, Mrs. Sue Chapotelle, and Mme Annette St. Arnaud. Also accompanying them are parents Mrs. Diane Tymchuk, Mrs. Tammy Graff, Mrs. Joanne Potts, Mr. David Nelson, Mr. Wes Latimer, Mrs. Colleen Marks, Mr. Erik Clausen, Mrs. Theresa Sterling, Mrs. Colleen Jackson, Mrs. Pat Towle, and Mrs. Florence Waldner. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

1:50

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the galleries today we have a number of guests who are here to observe the introduction of Bill 6. I would like to introduce various representatives of both the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group and the Workers' Compensation Board. Here representing the disenfranchised widows on the executive committee are Carolyn Berube, Shirley Fry, Val Benoit, Leta Schmaltz, Joan Snow, and Penny Frederiksen. Also from the Workers' Compensation Board is Doug Mah, their legal counsel. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all the members of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an extreme pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you a group of 24 grade 8 students from Gracefield, Quebec. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Dominique Dery, and parents Stephane Charbois, Marguerite Todd, and Debbie Patrick from Edmonton. These students are part of an exchange program with Laurier Heights school in the Edmonton-Riverview constituency. They arrived in Edmonton on February 23 and will return home March 1.

With your indulgence I would like to share with the Assembly some of the highlights of their visit. This is their first visit to western Canada. They have been to an Oilers/Bruins game, have spent a day at Laurier Heights school, have traveled to Jasper, to West Edmonton Mall, to Edmonton city hall, are touring the Legislature today, and will also be touring the Canadian Petroleum Interpretive Centre, and will go rock climbing at Vertically Inclined. I would like these students to rise and receive the most warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four members of the 189th Pathfinders from Silver Springs in Calgary. They are led by their leader, Lorna Stevens, and accompanied by Samantha Todd, Gillian Siddall, and Naomi Piovesan. They've been visiting a number of the sites in Edmonton for the past weekend and spent today touring the Legislature to observe the proceedings of the Legislature. They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 10 keen and inquisitive

students of the Grant MacEwan College social work program. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Duane Massing, and I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Legislature. They're in the public gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today and introduce another member of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. A very keen observer of this particular Bill 6 that's coming forward is Pauline Knittle, who is here along with some friends. I'd her and her entourage to rise and take the warm blessings and reception of this House please.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly more members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. I would like to introduce to you Muriel Johnson, Jeff Johnson, Mary Wasylkiewicz, Walter Wasylkiewicz. The husband of Pauline Knittle was not previously introduced: Werner Knittle. Those constituents are good friends of mine, and I'm very pleased to see them here for the introduction of this bill. Would they please stand and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly. They are in the members' gallery.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Melissa Johnson, a graduate student in health promotion at the University of Alberta. Melissa also works at Canadian Blood Services and is a member of the Health Services Association of Alberta. She is seated in the public gallery. I'll ask Melissa to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some other members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. They are Colleen Korbisser, Bob Prest, Pat Dober, Evelyn Frericks, Margaret Leonard, Mary-Ann Charbonneau, Joyce Neve, Bernice Pagee, Iris Penner-Sumpka, Carol Ross, Nora Biggs, Irene Lagace and Mary MacKenzie. They are seated in the members' and the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, as I call on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, would you join with me in extending to him the best of happy birthdays today on his birthday.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you so much for that reminder, Mr. Speaker. I will ensure that you will be reminded on yours.

It's my pleasure today to introduce a constituent of the city of Fort McMurray, Mme Kjersti Powell. Kjersti presently is the chair of the Keyano College board of governors, where she has sat for the past six years, and she's also the immediate past chair for the provincial council of board chairs for the colleges and technical institutions. She's a senior manager of Syncrude Canada, which is responsible for workplace learning. I'd ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all legislators.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to further introduce more members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group that were forgotten in the earlier ones. They are Edmonton residents Mary and Ralph Dietz. If they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

### Opted-out Physicians

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier advise Albertans what negotiations are occurring with the College of Physicians and Surgeons with regard to physicians opting out of the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not privy to any of those discussions. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is, and I'll have him respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any negotiations taking place with respect to that particular item. Certainly we do consult. We do have meetings periodically with the College of Physicians and Surgeons over issues of mutual concern. Actually, this sounds like something of a rhetorical question from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, because it is the Liberal Party which is advocating that physicians get out of the public health care system and practise privately.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's not rhetoric; it's draft policy guidelines of the College of Physicians and Surgeons on opting out, which I'm happy to table.

My second question, Mr. Speaker, is: can the Premier provide any information on how this process of opting out will work?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a responsibility of the Department of Health and Wellness, and I'll have the appropriate minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there has existed for some time under the provisions of the health insurance act in this province a set of steps or a process for a physician to opt out of the insurance program. I'm happy to report that to my knowledge there is only one physician in the province who has taken the formal steps of opting out under a procedure actually supported by legislation, which has been in existence for a long time.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is in fact a new process. So the question back to the Premier is: why has this opting out process been drafted before the legislation is introduced and without public input?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge of any policy being drafted. Again, if the hon. minister has some knowledge, perhaps he can expound on it, if he has any knowledge.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there is a policy and set of steps that exist right now in the province – and it's in accordance with the rules and rulings under the Canada Health Act – that a physician may opt out of the health care insurance plan.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier explain what would happen in an emergency if an entire specialty had opted out of the health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that indeed is hypothetical, but relative to the policy, the minister has explained it once. If the hon. Leader of the Liberal Opposition doesn't understand it, perhaps he can explain it again.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated but don't mind at all repeating, under current legislation, under current provisions – and I think this is basically common to all the provinces of Canada – there is the right of a physician to move out of the coverage under the payments of the health care insurance plan. I think our record really in the province is exemplary in that at this point in time, as far as I'm aware, we have only one physician that has chosen to take that particular step.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why was the public not informed that these negotiations were under way given the severe impact on physician services in this province?

MR. KLEIN: As I have said about – well, this would be the fourth time now. I don't know of any negotiations under way, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. minister has pointed out, only one person has preferred to opt out. I can't conceive of a whole group of doctors associated with one discipline in Edmonton or in this province opting out. It's beyond comprehension that that would ever happen.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what would happen if a patient were seeing an opted-out physician, and they needed emergency or ICU care?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected, but any individual, any person in this province who has to go to a hospital is entitled to go to the hospital and receive whatever procedure is necessary under Alberta health care.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules**

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the Leader of the Official Opposition for the third main question, I'd just like to reiterate *Beauchesne* 409(3), which says:

The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

The hon. Leader of the Official of the Opposition.

#### **Private Health Services**

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans still haven't seen the blank pages on the private hospital policy, so the question is: how can Albertans trust the government when it says that it's talking about private clinics, yet its own focus group documents say that they're talking about private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Well, my answer to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is wait and see what the legislation says. As a matter of fact, the hon. member has said before that she might even support this legislation, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm just going to give her a little hint. This is a quote from *Hansard*. She says:

The Premier has talked about the possibility of the Official Opposition supporting the legislation which the government is about to bring in. Well, I think that possibility does exist. I actually think that possibility exists if this government brings in legislation which is going to control the growth, control the quantity, and control the quality of some off-site services.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's what a lot of the legislation is going to be about. I hope that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is going to be good to her word. I really do hope. I hope that she is going to be honest and truthful and not back down like she has on so many other issues. I hope she's going to be honest, and I hope she's going to be good to her word.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans trust a government that won't reveal the results of focus groups paid for by Albertans' own tax dollars?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, many of the comments offered by members of the focus groups were contained in the document *We Are Listening: Here's What We've Heard*. I'd be glad to table that document in the House. There are numerous quotes from members of the focus groups, but certainly those people participated in the focus groups on the condition of anonymity.

Relative to the freedom of information legislation the Liberals know what the legislation is all about. They use it more than any other body, so they know what it's all about. If they don't like what they get under the rules of FOIP, there is a course of appeal, and I would advise them to take it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has a choice, and he knows it. He says that he can't, and the truth is that he won't.

How can Albertans trust a government when they know their government is hiding the results of those focus groups?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the FOIP request came through the Department of Health and Wellness. [interjections] Well, it didn't come through my office. It came through the Department of Health and Wellness, and I will ask the hon. minister to respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation was an important piece of legislation debated by this Assembly and ultimately supported unanimously. In it is outlined a process, a set of procedures, certain prohibitions. The hon. members across the way know that legislation. They supported it. We are providing information according to that legislation.

As the hon. Premier just mentioned, there is an avenue of appeal if they are not satisfied with some particular information that is provided or its nature, and we invite them to follow the appeal process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government has announced plans to send copies of its private, for-profit hospitals legislation to every household in Alberta any day now. The New Democrats have no problem with sending a copy of the legislation itself. However, Albertans would be better served if the householder contained balanced information about the pros and cons of government plans. My question is to the Premier. In the interests of Albertans receiving balanced information, will the government include in the householder a copy of the executive summary of a January 2000 study by the Consumers' Association of Canada which

conclusively shows that Calgary's privatization of contract surgery has not reduced waiting times or saved money? If not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that study is open to another study or lots of other studies that say quite the opposite. I mean, we can get involved in tabling study after study and study, one study disagreeing with another study.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, what we will be tabling is the proposed legislation. There is nothing more powerful. No study in the world is more powerful than a bill that is to become law. There is nothing more powerful than the law. That is what is going to be sent to every household in this province, a bill that proposes to become the law of this province. Nothing, not all the studies in the world, is more paramount, is more important than what this Legislature decides to do in bringing about the law of this province.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Premier agrees that balanced public debate is important on this bill, so I'll ask him again: in order to ensure that Albertans receive a balanced perspective on health care privatization, will the government include in the householder a copy of a study entitled *The Role of Private and Public Health Care Delivery in Alberta*, which was presented to the recent Alberta Congress Board health care forum by respected health economist Bob Evans?

MR. KLEIN: Here again the only thing that will be mailed out to Albertans is the proposed bill, an explanation, of course, of the various principles of the bill, Mr. Speaker, and again I stress that there is nothing more paramount than a bill that is proposed to become the law. We could mail out study after study after study, one study contradicting the other study. What matters is the bill.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, the bill is not, as the hon. member so falsely states, the private, for-profit health care bill. That is wrong. That is absolutely wrong. He has not told the truth in this Assembly by stating that that is going to be the name of the bill. He has not stated the truth. The title of the bill will be the health protection act.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I won't call the Premier to order on what he has just said, but I want to again challenge him. Why won't his government release to the public, along with its own householder, information they so desperately need in order to judge for themselves whether the government is telling the truth or not?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I give Albertans a tremendous amount of credit for intelligence, the ability to see through a bill that proposes to become law and decide for themselves whether it is the right thing to do. There is nothing preventing this member from duplicating and copying as many copies as he wants of all the studies he wants and mailing them out. I hope not at government expense, because it goes on and on and on. There are literally hundreds of studies out there on this particular issue. What we want to get out is the bill that proposes to become law relative to the delivery of health care services and the protection of the public health care system as we know it today. That's all we want to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. On Saturday I attended a public forum on health care in my constituency organized by the Alberta

Teachers' Association local. Also in attendance was the Leader of the Opposition, a representative of the New Democrats, along with a nursing representative. Anxious to hear Albertans' views, the Minister of Health and Wellness dropped in to the public forum just in time for the question and answer period. I asked the moderator if the minister could join me during the question and answer session. His participation was totally refused. For the record, Mr. Minister, are you willing and able to get out and talk to Albertans about the health care proposal under discussion, and if so, how do you plan to give Albertans accurate, current, factual information so Albertans in turn can decide on their own whether or not this is a sound proposal and policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, could I ask your indulgence to hear the question? I couldn't hear the question.

MRS. GORDON: For the record, Mr. Minister, are you willing and able to get out and talk to Albertans about the health care proposal under discussion, and if so, how do you plan to give Albertans accurate, current, factual information so Albertans in turn can decide on their own whether or not this is a sound proposal and policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as has been outlined in this Assembly prior to this, we have provided initially a policy statement which is available to all Albertans. That was some months ago actually. We have followed that up with such communications to the public of the province as the one which provides the results of our consultation to date, what we've heard about this particular policy paper. There are various other initiatives that have been taken.

As we move towards the very important aspect of debating the legislation in the House, Mr. Speaker, it is our plan, as the Premier has certainly well outlined, that every household in this province will be provided a copy of the bill so that they can read it and study it and judge for themselves. Certainly overall we are working through the media and through the printed word to provide information.

As far as attendance at meetings is concerned, Mr. Speaker, I have been going to meetings on this particular topic. Most recently I was out at Mundare speaking to a group of good people out there. I will continue to make myself available as much as possible.

MRS. GORDON: Again, my question is to the minister of health. What will be the role of the MLA health information panel in supporting communication efforts? Do you feel their work will be muzzled as well?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the health information panel will be a very, very important aspect of our overall communication program, both in terms of getting information out but even more importantly in listening to what Albertans have to say with respect to the legislation. The work of these teams will be very, very important to hear to bring back to government caucus the response to the legislation so we can proceed according to their views.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, what opportunity will there be for changes to the proposed legislation if it should not meet the priorities of Albertans once they've had a chance to look at, study it, and talk about it?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we feel that we are developing sound legislation, but certainly legislation is subject to the will of the Assembly. Any amendments that may be made will be dealt with in this House of course, but they will be based on what government members hear in the extensive set of meetings and

consultations and print material that is going to be out there for Albertans to respond to. Of course, if it should occur, we are always open to constructive views from across the way to help with the improvement of the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc.

### Regional Health Authority Contracts

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans cannot trust a Premier who appears to put the public health care of citizens after the private interests of the friends of government. Now, this presents a particular problem in the Calgary health region, which is now effectively run out of the Premier's own office. The Calgary regional health authority is paying out more than \$250 million a year to private contractors, but when we ask, when Albertans ask for particulars of the contracts, we are flatly denied. My question is to the Premier this afternoon. How can Calgarians trust a government that has stubbornly refused to tell them how much of their public money is being diverted away from public health to private facilities owned by the Premier's backers?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I consider that question to be at least improper, certainly rude. I would like to know what clinics, you know, what private operations are being supported by my backers. Your boss's brother is involved in one of these. I don't think he's one of my backers. [interjections] Well, I don't know if he is or not.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the question of how Albertans can trust this Premier, I see in this House 64 Conservatives. There's a lot more of us than there is of them. And you know how that came about? It's because they trust us a lot more than they trust them.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be this: how can Calgarians trust a government that has set up no mechanism to screen, evaluate, and deal with conflicts of interest when the Calgary regional health authority pays out its \$250 million in secret contract deals?

MR. KLEIN: Give me some specifics. Is he talking about the Bethany care centre, for instance? Is that one of them? I asked the question. Maybe the hon. member will answer the question. Is he talking about the Bethany care centre? Or is he talking about the Morgentaler therapeutic abortion centre? Right. That's one of them. You know, be quite specific. I'll ask the hon. member to be quite specific as to the clinics he's talking about.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Gimbel's maybe.

MR. KLEIN: Well, maybe Gimbel's, yes. Well, I will admit that Mr. Gimbel's daughter is on my board. Shameful, shameful. I mean, that can happen. I would think that he might have some people on his board who might, just might be involved in some kind of a private diagnostic operation.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Oh, I don't think so.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, no. No. He's that pure.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that this hon. member will support the legislation if he is indeed honourable. Right now the only legislation relative to those contracts is under FOIP. The legislation, without going into the details, purports to make those contracts much more open and transparent, and I hope that he'll support that.

MR. DICKSON: Long answer and totally nonresponsive.

So I'll go back and ask the Premier again: how can Albertans have any confidence in this government's ability to be fair when they've set up absolutely no mechanism to screen, identify, and deal with conflicts of interest when they're paying out that \$250 million of public money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, wait until the hon. member sees the legislation.

If he has instances right now of conflict of interest, table them. You know, don't do this by innuendo. I know that they're good at innuendo, because that's all they've got. I know they're good at innuendo, but if they have these examples, get them out there. Help us with this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

### Federal Support for Agriculture

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister of agriculture. This government has engaged in significant dialogue with the federal government on the issue of farm income. We have made enhancements to our program, and the minister has been encouraging Ottawa to do the same through a number of meetings. The Premier wrote to the Prime Minister last month demanding federal action on reducing grain transportation costs. Despite this, the Prime Minister has announced a onetime payment to Saskatchewan and Manitoba farmers amounting to \$240 million. So, Mr. Minister, the question is: why wasn't Alberta a part of this announcement?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't understand how the federal Liberals came to the conclusion that hardship in farming stops at a provincial border. I must remind the hon. member that it is not only Alberta that's left out. There are some seven other agricultural provinces that are left out, and we find it extremely distasteful.

I know our Premier has on a number of occasions talked to the Prime Minister and brought it up at the ministers' meeting. Our Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has discussed it with her counterparts. I have brought the issue up at three ag ministers' meetings. As a matter of fact, the last agricultural ministers' meeting was just on this issue. I've made three trips down to Ottawa and had private meetings with the federal minister of agriculture. In every one of those meetings we've said that we have farmers that are in just as much difficulty as those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. We're not saying for a moment that the people in Saskatchewan and Manitoba don't need and deserve the money. However, we also need to have some recognition of the difficulty that our farmers are having, and we intend to push the issue.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: My understanding is that this aid is to cover the higher costs of grain transportation in the absence of the Western Grain Transportation Act. Do Alberta farmers not face higher grain transportation costs as well?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberals' excuse is about the most bogus thing that I could imagine. The fact is that in some 44 stations in Alberta the freight rate is higher than it is in Saskatchewan. So, in fact, to say that the freight is the problem is simply not the case.

It's very interesting when you look at what happened in the past.

Back in the late '80s, when the federal government was talking about paying out the Crow, there was just about \$7 billion on the table. Saskatchewan and Manitoba were the two governments that objected to that payment. So what did we get? One point six billion dollars.

Really I think that to talk about transportation is just not true. As a matter of fact, since the Crow was paid out, freight rates for Alberta farmers have gone up 116 percent.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: What steps will the minister take to ensure that Alberta farmers are treated equally with those who just happen to live across a line on a map?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been in contact with other provincial ministers, and we will continue that dialogue. We plan on going to Ottawa as soon as we can arrange some meetings. I was in Ottawa some two to three weeks ago, had the opportunity to meet with some eight federal ministers along with the Privy Council, the Prime Minister's office, and treasury.

There is one thing that the federal government could do that almost immediately would very much help the situation, and that's directly related to transportation. That's to accept the Estey/Kroeger report and get this thing moving, get the Wheat Board out of the management, the handling of grain and move forward.

Now, I was in Ottawa along with the Prairie Farm Commodity Coalition. This coalition represents some 90,000 producers across the prairie provinces, so it's not just an Alberta organization. We also had along with us a very progressive grain company, United Grain Growers, a company that's interested in the producer, not just their corporate structure. We recommended that the federal government get on with this. There's \$200 million to \$300 million available to farmers, not tax dollars, farmers' dollars, on a yearly basis if the system were changed. So that'll be one of our thrusts.

Another, of course, is to try to get the federal government to back off their fuel taxes. There's some \$600 million going out of this province every year to the federal treasury, and we get nothing back.

MR. SMITH: How much?

MR. LUND: Zero. As a matter of fact, it's very interesting that in the most recent studies for every dollar we get out of the federal government, it costs us \$1.40, and that does nothing for federalism.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to follow on that same line of questioning, but I'm really looking for the truthful situation behind this. You know, the other day the Premier cited the Prime Minister as saying that farmers expect their government to work together to find solutions. So my question is to the Premier. Why didn't the Premier or his minister of agriculture go to Ottawa with the Premiers of Manitoba and Saskatchewan last fall to make the case for Alberta farmers?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that Premiers Romanow and Doer went to Ottawa seeking something in excess of \$1 billion in direct farm aid. I think the hon. minister has pointed out why we weren't there. We feel that, yes, if there is going to be money, then it should go to all provinces equally and not be singled out. If there is going to be money. The Prime Minister first indicated that there was going to be no money. Last week he phoned me and said that there was going to be some money. He didn't say that he was going to exclude Alberta or any other province.

We have stressed time and time again that the solution to this

problem is not the Liberal solution, where they would just like to put their heads in the sand with their hand out. Our solution is to accept the recommendations of the Estey/Kroeger report and have the Canadian government develop a strong stance at the WTO table to get rid of all subsidies. There's a third component to this, and that is to allow dual marketing under the Canadian Wheat Board so that our farmers can add revenue to their products and contract directly. That's the solution.

MR. LUND: Since you brought up the trip that two other Premiers made, I want to tell you that in fact I was in Ottawa. I met with the federal minister of agriculture the night before those Premiers did. Consistently we have said that if there is more money – and as the Premier pointed out, consistently the Prime Minister and the federal minister have said that there is no more money, so we were working within the envelope of \$1.1 billion. As a matter of fact, just before we made the changes to our FIDP program, I went to Ottawa and warned the federal government that we were going to make the changes and that if there was any new money, I wanted their 60 percent, because that's what the old formula is. So we will continue to push to get our share of the money.

MRS. SOETAERT: Given that the Premier wouldn't go to the table with the other Premiers, I want to know: will the Premier make it up to those farmers? Will he make up the amount that they would have received from the federal government had Alberta participated in the request to the federal government? It was at least \$28 million.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, because of our responsible approach to the province's finances we were able to put in a hundred million dollar program, a program that was beyond the capability of the other provinces to put in to accommodate those farmers experiencing disastrous situations. We do not believe that it is appropriate simply to go to Ottawa and say: give us a billion dollars and bail us out.

I have sat down with the hon. minister and members of the Prairie Farm Commodity Coalition to develop a co-ordinated approach to this issue. This coalition represents, I believe, by and large the majority of the commodity producers in this province. Their position is our position, and that is that the way to solve this is to give a better overall deal to farmers relative to transportation costs, get the Wheat Board out of where it ought not to be involved, Mr. Speaker, and allow dual marketing. That will return literally hundreds of millions of dollars to the farmers. That is the solution.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question: how can we possibly trust a Premier who ignores hardworking Alberta farmers and refuses to go to Ottawa and fight on their behalf?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I find it so interesting that the Liberals would be talking about – the last time I heard a Liberal talk about anything to do with farming it was the late hon. Laurence Decore, who wondered how you could catch all the cows flatulating so that we could . . . [interjections] Well, I've never heard them talk about farm programs before, but this hon. minister has been working night and day with the farmers to find reasonable long-term solutions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

#### **Private Health Services** (continued)

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans want more information about what the government proposes under its



policy on the delivery of surgical services. There are certain groups in the province which claim that this government is introducing private, American style health care or some type of two-tier, for-profit design to erode our medicare as we know it. Now, many people in this province are given the impression that they will have to pay for medical services under this new policy. My question is to the minister of health. Will any Albertan have to pay from his or her own pocket to get health care under the government's new proposal?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear now and will be very clear in the legislation that individual Albertans and their families will not have to pay for medically insured, medically covered services. That will be ensconced in the legislation.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you. My supplemental to the minister of health is: can the minister assure Albertans and this House that the rich won't be able to jump the queue and pay for faster services under this new proposal?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as we have indicated very clearly in our policy statement and we intend to follow-up very precisely in the legislation, the government is committed to ensuring that no one is allowed to queue-jump or to get faster treatment for insured services by virtue of their paying extra. That will not be allowed.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister is: what impact will this type of proposal have on recruiting and retaining physicians and health care professionals within this province?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the policy statement evolves into legislation, the legislation, I think, will provide a sound structure for health care professionals to practise in this province. It will remove the legislative gap that was identified some time ago which we were addressing with Bill 37. It was, of course, opposed by the hon. opposition. They did not like that legislative gap to be closed.

There will be a legislative framework which invites innovation and change and a new way of delivering services, albeit within the principles of the Canada Health Act and with no queue-jumping and no other discrepancies with respect to the Canada Health Act's application. I think it will provide us with a good structure. It will provide certainty and a good overall governance model in which physicians and nurses and LPNs and the whole health workforce can work cohesively.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

### Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Wednesday, prior to tabling the budget last week, the government told Albertans that 2,200 teachers and teaching aides would be hired. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. How was the number 2,200 determined to be the appropriate number of teachers and needed teaching aides?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely right. An example of 2,200 was given. If those dollars were used exclusively for hiring teachers, there would be around 2,200 teachers' aides and teachers that could potentially be hired.

In the budget, as the hon. member well knows, I gave the school

boards flexibility in how they use that money. So, Mr. Speaker, they have the ability to use that money, to put that money where they feel the most important need is. Whether it's in the Northland school district or down south, the school boards have the flexibility to put it to the students' greatest needs.

2:40

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the promised action on class size, what kind of reductions can parents expect to see with this announcement?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are several areas in this budget where if class size can be decreased, as one of the things that I have already announced in the budget, which is the Alberta initiative for school improvement, I fully expect that a lot of the school boards will be using that \$66 million per year, \$170 million over the next three years, to decrease class size. With the 3 percent general grant that is also out there, they also have the ability to decrease class size.

The second part of the question that the hon. member asked was: where do I expect to see class size? Mr. Speaker, there has been research done in the States that shows that in K to 3 we should drop class size to 17 or lower. There are a lot of variables in that, but as a general rule that is the class size that I would like to aim for.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With contract settlements increasing by 3 percent over the next year and an additional 8,000 students, how will boards achieve class size reductions and provide parent relief from fund-raising with this?

DR. OBERG: When you look at the budget, there are two elements to the budget. First of all, there is a 3 percent general increase to the grant of this year. But, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, there's a full 8.8 percent increase that goes directly to the school boards that will go directly to the classroom.

The hon. member raises an interesting point, which is a point about enrollment, and indeed there have been comments in the media about these dollars not keeping up with enrollment and inflation. Mr. Speaker, interestingly, our enrollment increase in Alberta last year was just slightly over 1 percent, so despite the fact that we're seeing a lot of people coming into Alberta, the actual number of students is only going up around 1 percent. As I said before, the overall grant increase to the school boards was 8.8 percent versus 1 percent on the enrollment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Alberta Children's Hospital

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the *Calgary Herald* today there was an article outlining the possibility that the Shriners of North America could become involved in operating the Alberta Children's hospital, which is located in my constituency. One of the reasons that the Shriners were given for considering Alberta as an area of interest was the perceived very positive climate in this province. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: could the minister advise whether or not there are plans at this time for the Shriners to begin operations in this province?

### Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister and hon. member, *Beauchesne* 408 clearly says that "such questions should . . . not inquire whether or not statements made in a newspaper are correct." Proceed with the second one. Perhaps you can phrase it differently.

### Alberta Children's Hospital

(continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that the development of the Alberta Children's hospital is under consideration either on its current site or possibly under operations on a new site, could the minister please advise this Assembly whether or not the Shriners will be involved in any of those discussions?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that the redevelopment of the Children's hospital in Calgary by the Calgary regional health authority is at the top of their capital construction priority list. Further, I know that they are looking at the location. They're also looking at partnership arrangements, particularly with the Calgary health foundation, which will be providing a tremendous amount of financial support to enhance the actual building that is planned.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, a highly reputable organization such as the Shriners, who have had decades and decades of service to children all across the world, for that matter, but particularly in North America, would be welcomed in terms of discussions as to how the overall contribution of the Shriners and the regional health authority and the government could work together to have an even more world-class facility than we have now for children's care.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the minister. With respect to the capital planning for the regional health authority, could the minister please advise the Assembly whether the Children's hospital will be able to meet the current and future needs of Calgary and southern Alberta children?

MR. JONSON: Well, the answer, Mr. Speaker, as I understand the overall plan: it certainly will.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

### Western Heritage Centre

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The scandal of the Western Heritage Centre in Cochrane continues. Despite the advice of the time pointing out the lack of support, the wildly optimistic business plans, and the failed fund-raising attempts, the government subsidized the building of this centre by over \$5 million, and the government is now back in the business and has stepped in to take over ownership and operations of this Tory white elephant. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. What was the government decision-making process, the rationale for putting money in to build this centre in the first place?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, I think we should put some real, relevant facts on the table. First of all, there was a provincial commitment of some 5 million dollars. There was also a commitment and a payment of \$2.5 million from the federal government. There was also a \$5 million fund-raising venture, a very successful one, that was put forward by the society which ended up in the construction of a \$12 million facility.

There was a bit of discussion around this particular facility, granted, back in 1990. One of the stipulations in the contract was that they would lease the land from the provincial government for some 99 years. Another stipulation, which I'm sure was anticipated, is that they would not come asking for operating dollars. Currently the group was having some difficulty. We had discussions over a year, and it was deemed that if the centre folded, the province would end up getting the centre returned to them in a good manner, without

any liability or encumbrances. So we've chosen to take the centre back, as we would have no choice as per the agreement, but secondly and more importantly, Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that the people of southern Alberta and that area continue with the fine program that was coming out of there, the operations and the cost of the operations stay with the society. So we only have the building that we're looking after.

MS BLAKEMAN: To the same minister: did the department ever request advice from the Auditor General in judging the feasibility of this project, either in the beginning or recently?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: No, Mr. Speaker.

MS BLAKEMAN: To the same minister: since no additional funding for this project shows in the museum's budget, where will the money come from to subsidize this problem-plagued centre?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, I'm rather dismayed that the hon. member hasn't completed her research. As I indicated, the operations, the programming are still the responsibility of the centre. They will be funding it all. There isn't any Community Development money going in there. That building is now owned by Community Development, and as such and as it would be with the Provincial Museum, the Tyrrell Museum, and any other provincially owned buildings, the maintenance is looked after through Infrastructure.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members to participate today.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

### 2:50 Provincial High School Wrestling Championships

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the hard work and dedication of the competitors and volunteers of the provincial high school wrestling championships, that took place in Wetaskiwin this past weekend. The sport of wrestling is one of the oldest and purest sport competitions. There is likely no greater test of strength, agility, speed, and discipline offered than through this sport of individual competition.

The Wetaskiwin composite high school did a great job of hosting this event, and it was a great success, with enthusiastic participants and spectators. I'd like to congratulate the Wetaskiwin team for winning the 3A boys event. I'd also like to recognize Wetaskiwin individual medalists Real Bouchard and Tyler Weaver, who each won silver; Josh Tarnasky, who won bronze; and Wade Clark, who took sixth.

The sport of wrestling has been with us for thousands of years, with its origins in ancient Greece. I'd like to thank the participants and organizers for continuing this proud sport tradition.

Thank you.

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

### Scout/Guide Week

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to recognize this past Scout/Guide Week of February 20 to 27. Scouts Canada members participated in events across Canada in special camps, expeditions, mall displays, banquets, and church parades. Scouts Canada is the country's leading youth organization, which offers fun, safe, and exciting outdoor adventures for boys and

girls ages five to 26. Scouting is based on three principles: duty to God, duty to others, duty to self.

I was honoured last Wednesday evening to be at the fourth Spruce Grove annual Lord Baden-Powell banquet. I was inspired by these young leaders who volunteer many hours in our community. I was impressed and entertained by the Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Venturers, leaders, and parents of these dynamic children. I was honoured and humbled to have been invested by the group and to take the Scout oath, which is: "On my honour I promise to do my best, to do my duty to God and the Queen, to help other people at all times, and to carry out the Scout law." My heartfelt respect and admiration go to all of those involved in the Scout movement.

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

### **Meningitis Immunization Campaign**

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today will bring to a conclusion the Capital health authority's targeted meningitis immunization operation. The campaign began on February 14 for 15 to 19 year olds, and an expanded campaign for two to 14 year olds began in the Capital health authority's region on Wednesday, February 23, in response to an increased incidence in this age group and significant public concern. An 80 percent completion target for 15 to 19 year olds and two to 14 year olds is expected by the end of the campaign today.

On Saturday I had the opportunity to tour the operation at St. Albert Place with supervisor Joanne Rigby. It was a remarkably impressive sight of efficiency and caring. Today I'd like to commend Dr. Gerry Predy, under whose direction this entire operation took place. In addition, I applaud Marianne Stewart and her organization in staffing 9,000 additional nursing shifts.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking everyone who made this a successful operation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### **Freedom to Read Week**

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 27 to March 4 is Freedom to Read Week. A clenched fist slamming a book shut is the symbol adopted for this week, signifying the censorship of ideas. Censoring is what some citizens would have us do with ideas that are morally contrary or troublesome. Freedom to Read Week is a fight against such censorship.

The focus on reading this week reminds us that our democracy rests on a set of freedoms: the freedom of conscience and religion; the freedom of association; the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression; and, important for this week, the freedom to access the thoughts and ideas of others. Supporting intellectual freedom in a democracy often puts citizens to the test. Certainly it is easy to defend the freedom to read when we are confronted with Shakespeare or Mark Twain. The test comes when we are forced to confront ideas that, although within the law, are deeply disturbing, offensive, or odious. As we go about our Freedom to Read Week activities, let's remember Voltaire's advice: I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

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

### **Gold Cup Soccer Championship**

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and recognize the Alberta-based Canadian national soccer

team. This team, which plays and practises regularly at Edmonton's Commonwealth Stadium, made international news yesterday by upsetting Colombia, a World Cup soccer regular, in a 2-0 clinch in the first Gold Cup title. It is the premier championship event in soccer for the Americas. Before the historic winning of this tournament Canada was ranked only 85th internationally. However, with its three straight sudden death play-off wins over teams ranked well above it, it became 10th in the world and has won the berth in the prestigious Confederations Cup. As a result of this tremendous effort, Team Canada has risen to a 30th world ranking.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all dedicated soccer players and their parents and this community and the government of Alberta, which supports minor sports, which definitely has had a role to play in the development of this national team, and on behalf of the students and young people I know that play in the Calgary community, including my son David, I want to congratulate them for this prestigious and tremendous upset.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a Standing Order 40.

### **Freedom to Read Week**

Mr. Dickson:

Be it resolved that this Assembly affirm the importance of open access to reading material by recognizing February 27 to March 4, 2000, as Freedom to Read Week.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing with respect to the notice I'd given earlier. On the matter of urgent and pressing necessity, it's my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, that as elected leaders in this province it is not enough for one member to pay tribute. It's important that every elected leader in this province signal their support for it.

Three points I'd make in terms of pressing and/or urgent necessity. Firstly, the week is being celebrated this week. This is the appropriate time to do it, with events in Calgary and Edmonton and right across Canada. It affects many librarians, book publishers, booksellers, authors, poets, and Canadians everywhere who love to read.

The second point is that our minister responsible for this area had produced an information bulletin on February 25, 2000, and there's a serious error that has to be remedied. The notice refers to: "Our libraries provide equal access to people of any origin, age, race, religion, economic status or view." Since it's clear that the hon. Minister of Community Development completely misapprehends what Freedom to Read Week is about, it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we have a chance to debate that and signal that it's not about getting into the library, that it's about what books you can read and take out once you get through the doors.

The third thing is that we've had a series of problems, most recently at the Chapters bookstore in south Calgary, where books have been destroyed. We've had a situation where the Calgary Public Library has recently dealt with a controversial policy with respect to Internet access.

Mr. Speaker, I think these are all compelling reasons, with respect, why we should at least briefly debate this and then as elected leaders in this province register our support for this very important event. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under a Standing Order 40 notification the proponent of it asks for unanimous consent, so I will now ask the question of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:00

head: Orders of the Day

**head: Committee of Supply**

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of Supply to order.

The chair will recognize the Opposition House Leader. Go ahead.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. There are some housekeeping things we have to deal with. I understand one of them is for the opposition to designate the five departments pursuant to Standing Order 56(2)(a). Unless you tell me otherwise, I'm assuming that it's in order now for me to make that designation or at least to confirm written notice that's gone earlier to the Government House Leader. The departments that will be designated pursuant to that are Health and Wellness, Learning, Children's Services, Environment, and Human Resources and Employment. Those are the five departments being designated pursuant to Standing Order 56(2)(a). I think that's all you need from me at this point.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Calgary-Buffalo.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would regret to inform the Assembly that as of this moment there is not an all-party agreement governing the use of time in designated supply subcommittees, the Official Opposition wanting to make sure that we appropriately designate the third party in that one and the third party wanting to maintain its designation. However, we can continue under the ordinary rules of the House until such time as we are able to obtain an agreement.

The hon. Opposition House Leader has indicated to the Assembly which of the five departments it wishes to appear before designated subcommittees of supply, so I'm now pleased to table with the House a list of the members of those five subcommittees of supply for the information of members.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you have enough copies for each member of the Assembly?

MR. HANCOCK: I don't have enough for everybody here today, but I assume that that's been provided to the Clerk's table earlier.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll get some made.

MR. HANCOCK: We'll get them copied and circulated.

Also, Madam Chairman, on Tuesday of last week I tabled for all members in the House in the form of a tabling a copy of a notice of motion for the proposed membership and to establish the A, B, C, D committees. Since then there have been a couple of minor changes from both sides of the House incorporated into the motion, and I'd like to bring them to the committee's attention before moving the motion and reading it into the record.

On the government side, Mrs. O'Neill was on committee A and Mr. Klapstein on committee C, and those two have been reversed. On committee A Mr. Cao replaces Mr. Marz.

On the opposition side, on committee A Mr. Wickman replaces Dr. Massey, on committee B Dr. Massey replaces Mr. Dickson, and on committee D Mr. Sapers replaces Mr. Wickman.

Madam Chairman, I'd like now to move the A, B, C, D motion with those changes.

**Subcommittees of Supply**

Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that:

1. Pursuant to Standing Order 57(1) four subcommittees of the Committee of Supply be established by the Committee of Supply with the following names: subcommittee A, subcommittee B, subcommittee C, and subcommittee D.
2. The membership of the respective subcommittees be as follows:  
 Subcommittee A: Mrs. Gordon, chairman; Mr. Severtson, deputy chairman; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Boutilier; Mrs. Burgener; Mr. Cao; Mr. Cardinal; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Dunford; Mr. Friedel; Mr. Hierath; Mr. Klapstein; Mr. Jacques; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. Mar; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Sapers; Mr. Smith; and Mr. Wickman.  
 Subcommittee B: Mr. Tannas, chairman; Mrs. Laing, deputy chairman; Ms. Blakeman; Ms. Calahasen; Mr. Doerksen; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Ms. Graham; Mr. Hancock; Ms. Kryczka; Ms. Leibovici; Dr. Massey; Mrs. McClellan; Mr. Melchin; Ms. Olsen; Mrs. Sloan; Mrs. Soetaert; Mr. Stelmach; Mr. Stevens; Mrs. Tarchuk; Mr. Woloshyn; and Mr. Zwozdesky.  
 Subcommittee C: Mr. Tannas, chairman; Mr. Fischer, deputy chairman; Mr. Cao; Ms. Evans; Mr. Gibbons; Mr. Jonson; Mr. Lund; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. McFarland; Mrs. Nelson; Dr. Nicol; Dr. Oberg; Mrs. O'Neill; Mr. Paszkowski; Mrs. Soetaert; Mr. Strang; Mr. Thurber; Mr. Trynchy; and Mr. Yankowsky.  
 Subcommittee D: Mrs. Gordon, chairman; Mr. Renner, deputy chairman; Mr. Amery; Mr. Broda; Ms. Carlson; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Havelock; Mr. Herard; Mr. Hlady; Mr. Langevin; Mr. Magnus; Dr. Pannu; Ms. Paul; Mr. Pham; Mr. Sapers; Mr. Shariff; Dr. Taylor; Dr. West; and Mr. White.
3. The following portions of the main estimates of expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, unless previously designated by the Leader of the Opposition to be considered by the designated supply subcommittees, be referred to the subcommittees for their reports to the Committee of Supply as follows:  
 Subcommittee A: Executive Council; Gaming; and the Provincial Treasurer.  
 Subcommittee B: Community Development; International and Intergovernmental Relations; Infrastructure; and Justice and Attorney General.  
 Subcommittee C: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Government Services; and Municipal Affairs.  
 Subcommittee D: Resource Development; Economic Development; and Innovation and Science.
4. When the Committee of Supply is called to consider the main estimates, it shall on the six calendar days after agreement on the motion establishing the subcommittees, excluding Thursdays designated by the Official Opposition, when main estimates are under consideration, resolve itself into two of the four subcommittees, both of which shall meet and report to the Committee of Supply.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, since this is a debatable motion, there are some things I wanted to say to it. You know, I'm struck every year when we create these A, B, C, D committees. I marvel at the fact that 83 intelligent, thoughtful, bright men and women from all over the province come together and have not been able to date to achieve a more satisfactory means of examining in this case about \$19 billion in expenditure.

It's gainsaid, I think, that probably the single most important thing we do as elected representatives is to deliberate on the budget for the province of Alberta. It's not that I subscribe to the notion that money is everything. The reality in government is that money drives the

programs and runs the programs. The concern is that provinces like Ontario have taken actually a Laurence Decore idea, which is to create powerful budget committees that have the power to bring in witnesses, that would meet six months before this time so that at the very time the Provincial Treasurer is starting to pull together the nuggets, the elements of his next year's budget, there would also be an all-powerful, all-party committee that would be sitting.

In the Ontario model that committee has powers to bring in witnesses, to examine things in detail. They wouldn't do all 17 government departments. They might choose six departments for a given year, and they would study them in depth. I think that Ontario has shown some great leadership there. It's vexing to my colleagues, I think to a man or a woman, that instead we're in these A, B, C, D committees. What's wrong with it? A couple of things, Madam Chairman.

You may not remember some of the concerns I raised last year about the A, B, C, D committees. I suspect that there are even some government members – maybe I could ask them to raise their hands now. Is there any government member that thinks we can do better than the A, B, C, D committees? Well, I understand they're a little bit sheepish, while the Government House Leader is here, to raise their hand, but we can maybe ask him to cover his eyes with his hands, and then we could ask everybody to indicate if they'd like to see a better way of doing it. [interjections] Well, my friend from Peace River and my friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat are quick to indicate in an indirect way – I think there's some sympathy to the point of view I'm expressing.

3:10

In any event, Madam Chairman, the process we have now brings no respect to our work as legislators. It brings no respect to this Chamber, and it does a huge disservice to the people of this province that the single most important job for their elected legislators to do is done in such a crummy, inefficient fashion. You know, maybe if you've got 64 members, it doesn't matter. You've got a dozen people to send upstairs to room 512 and a dozen to keep another committee going down here. The people I represent in Calgary-Buffalo may have interest in the committee upstairs in 512. They may have interest in the committee down here in the Chamber. We may be talking about seniors' issues up there. We may be talking about the advanced education portion of Learning down here.

I've tried. You know, Madam Chairman, I can be accused of not having enough imagination or just not running fast enough, but I've come down here and waited my turn to ask my question about advanced education, and I've just run as fast as my little legs would carry me upstairs to 512. You know what I find when I get there?

MRS. SOETAERT: It's over.

MR. DICKSON: Well, if it isn't over already, there's a long list of people who have been waiting there to ask their questions. [interjections]

You know, some helpful members have suggested that maybe there's a way to carve this up, but let me put it to you this way, through the chair. Ought it not to be a fundamental principle that an elected person who represents more than 30,000 constituents, that includes seniors and includes people at the high-income end and people at the low-income end and people who are new immigrants and people who are longtime Canadians and people who work in different industries – they're teachers and students and health care workers. Is it an unreasonable proposition to say that any single elected member should be able to offer commentary on the budget for any one of those departments? I think in fact it's a solid

proposition that that should happen. That should be accommodated, and the budget process we're about to vote on doesn't allow that to happen.

I know from my side conversations . . .

DR. WEST: Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can you give me a moment, hon. member?

MR. DICKSON: Oh, certainly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister.

#### **Point of Order Questioning a Member**

DR. WEST: Would the hon. member entertain a question in debate? It's 482 of *Beauchesne*.

MR. DICKSON: Of course I'd be happy to entertain a question from the esteemed minister.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Mr. Minister.

#### **Debate Continued**

DR. WEST: Given that I've attended a lot of these debates in 512 as they relate to the budget and that many of the members from the loyal opposition just read out a long list of questions, never raising their heads, could the hon. member answer me this question? Is it true what has been told to me, that you just get the questions without doing research yourself and just read them out without any prior knowledge of what you're doing?

MR. DICKSON: The short answer to that, Madam Chairman, would be this. Either the minister has never been in a room when this member has been asking questions or he hasn't been paying careful attention. I'd say to this minister – and each member can speak for themselves. I attempt, with the limitations that I have as an individual, to do my own research, to reflect the views that I hear from my constituents.

DR. WEST: That wasn't my observation.

MR. DICKSON: Well, the minister may have a contrary view, but if he watches me carefully – I'm going to make a point, Madam Chairman, of trying to go into that minister's department, and he'll see me looking at him eyeball to eyeball. He'll see me reading questions, and I may be reading questions that I've received from Calgary-Buffalo constituents. I would expect this minister to accord those questions the very same respect that he accords any other question asked, and I would think that this minister would recognize that every single member of this Assembly should be respected in that very same way.

DR. WEST: I just asked the question. You don't have to be defensive.

MR. DICKSON: Well, in fact, Madam Chairman, I see some back skating. The hon. minister skates backwards beautifully, almost as elegantly as he skates forward and from his seat.

In any event, the point I'm making, Madam Chairman, is this. When these A, B, C, D subcommittees come up for a vote, I cannot

vote for the committees because it is a process that has been demonstrated to be inadequate. It undermines the important work we do here. It undermines the quality of the representation that any of us provide. I'd make a special plea to those members – I see some of my friends from the Calgary government caucus are here, and I know they're always very involved in the budget process. I'd ask them to consider but for a moment being in my position and how they would manage.

You see, to somebody who isn't part of a standing policy committee, who isn't part of that caucus review – somebody may say that I'm lucky; I don't have to attend those meetings. The point is that those members have an opportunity and their constituents have an opportunity through their agency to be able to find out what's going on in the budget long before we see it brought in here. We have an independent member and we've certainly got some members in the Official Opposition caucus and we have a New Democrat member. I don't think any of us have that opportunity to attend those standing policy committees or government caucus meetings. We're denied that opportunity.

Now, Madam Chairman, I'm happy that I'm represented by an MLA with a distinguished background in accounting. I'm proud to be represented by an MLA who understands budget documents and the nuances and the notes that appear in the back of the statement. I would think, although I haven't specifically addressed this with my MLA, that he understands how important it is to adequate budget scrutiny that every member be able to deal with every single department and that nobody be denied the chance to both ask questions in 512 and ask questions here. Obviously we can't do it at the same time, but that opportunity ought to exist.

So I think I've talked about how Ontario does it better. I know that the Government House Leader has been sympathetic when I've gone on complaining about the frustration we experience, so I think there is some will to come up with a better system. All I can say, Madam Chairman, is that I have to hope this is the absolute last time, the last spring that we ever have to constitute A, B, C, D subcommittees. I hope we will have an opportunity to come up with a far, far better process.

Now, I know there are people anxious to do a throne speech. To members who are interested in pursuing my criticism or opposition criticism, I refer them to the debate in *Hansard* of March 15, 1999, starting at page 509 and continuing on, which goes through and in detail indicates concerns raised by my colleagues and myself. For all of those reasons I'm going to be voting against this motion and looking forward to the throne speech, that will be coming along.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just a few brief comments about my concerns about this budget process. I think it's no surprise to people in here that I've often spoken about being in two places at once being physically impossible. We all represent thousands of people, and though the procedure of getting the budget where it is is unfair, that having been said, we have the opportunity in this Legislature to debate it or to discuss it or to ask questions. When we're divided up to be in two places at once, if I have a concern about libraries in my constituency and then a concern about the environment, I can't be at those two places at once, and I find that patently unfair.

3:20

I know I've said this since we started this process. I was hoping that this time an agreement could be made to change it. However, maybe because it's an election year, they're not going to do that.

Maybe it's not. Who knows? I would really appreciate an opportunity to change this process, that I know we've made suggestions to change.

There's one other thing about room 512, and I've said it every time I've been in that room. I always hope that the committees I'm on meet in here, because I detest that room. It is way too close for people who sometimes disagree on issues. If we respected the traditions of the Assembly, we should be two sword lengths apart, and we truly aren't in that room. So when looking at the process for another time and another place, could that be part of the considerations taken?

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready to vote on the motion?  
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

AN HON. MEMBER: Waste more time.

MS BLAKEMAN: I disagree with the hon. member on the other side. I don't think debate is a waste of time. It's an interesting exchange of ideas and opinions in this Chamber, so I would like to do that despite the attempt at silencing from across the way.

This motion is about dividing all members of the Assembly into the four subcommittees of supply. When I try to explain to the constituents in Edmonton-Centre what has happened to the budget debate process and the scrutiny of the budget, they can't believe it. We by law are supposed to have 20 days of debate. Now, a day, if you ask most people, would be eight hours, 10 hours perhaps if we were being hopeful. But no. A day of debate in the Alberta Legislature is less than two hours, as generally spoken.

My colleagues have already mentioned being divided into committees so that in fact they're able to have one committee meet upstairs in room 512 and the second meet here in the Assembly Chamber, and that then counts as two days of debate, because there are two committees going on at the same time.

I, too, represent 35,000 people who have varied interests and would like me as their representative to be involved in as many different debates as is possible. We've already had some fairly vivid descriptions of trying to run up and down the stairs in order to get in line to ask questions, and I have spoken before about my extreme displeasure at only being able to capture 48 minutes of debate on the portfolio of Community Development, which has happened in the past.

So this motion to dissolve us into these four subcommittees of supply really does allow the government to telescope the time that the budget is being debated. Any member of the public who is interested in this and following it wants to know what's going on, and this shrinks the time that they can find out what was debated the previous day and be able to get their input through to their MLA and get it brought up. So I think that the very setup of it is precluding input from citizens to contribute to the debate.

I'd also like to point out that since the last time we were debating the budget, we now have several superministries, that have brought together a number of sectors that used to be separate entities. On top of the fact that we're divided in half and trying to debate these ministries in under two hours, we're now trying to debate superministries.

If you look, for example, at the Ministry of Learning, that used to be two separate entities: advanced education and education covering K to 12. What used to be two separate departments is now lumped into one possible time for debate. Or let's look at Human Resources and Employment, which is covering things from AISH and SFI, labour standards, consumer and corporate affairs. I mean, that used to be four different departments. All in one department, all to be

debated in a two-hour time span. So I have a real problem with this.

Now, the minister of energy – and actually it's thanks to him that I'm debating; he engaged me so much that I had to rise to speak to it – was questioning something about opposition members just having a list of questions run off by somebody. Well, I can assure him that I run those lists of questions off myself because I'm interested in them and I'm following through on the questions that have been brought forward to me by the people that live in Edmonton-Centre. You bet I've got my head down racing through those questions, with only 20 minutes to get every possible question out on entire departments, which, as I've just described, could be a department that used to be four separate departments. [interjection] The Minister of Justice is going to get into this debate. I can see he's been inspired by what's happened so far. I'm looking forward to his input.

We now have a budget that is presented on a Thursday, and by the following Monday we are debating one of the departments under that budget. So it means that citizens in Alberta, boy, have got to be with their fingers right on the button in order to get hold of a copy of this document, go through it, get in touch with their MLA, and hopefully be able to transfer that information or those questions to them prior to the beginning of that debate on a Monday.

So I have a real problem with Standing Order 57(1), putting us into four different committees, because I think this is going against the principle of an open and free and democratic debate on this budget process. That's all the money that is spent on behalf of this government for everything that happens for Albertans. We are now debating two and three departments a night in all of these different committees and racing through it as fast as possible. I strongly disagree with this, and I will be voting against the motion.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Haley	Melchin
Broda	Hancock	O'Neill
Burgener	Havelock	Pham
Calahasen	Herard	Renner
Cao	Hierath	Smith
Cardinal	Jacques	Stelmach
Clegg	Johnson	Stevens
Doerksen	Jonson	Strang
Ducharme	Klapstein	Tannas
Dunford	Laing	Taylor
Evans	Langevin	Trynchy
Forsyth	Lougheed	West
Friedel	Magnus	Woloshyn
Fritz	Mar	Yankowsky
Graham	McClellan	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Gibbons	Soetaert
Bonner	Olsen	White
Dickson	Paul	

Totals:

For – 44

Against – 8

[Motion carried]

3:40

### Designated Supply Subcommittees

Moved by Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2) five designated supply subcommittees be established by the Committee of Supply with the following names: Children's Services, Environment, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, and Learning. Be it further resolved that the membership of those committees be as follows:

Children's Services: Mr. Melchin, chairman; Mr. Cao; Mr. Cardinal; Mr. Johnson; Ms Kryczka; Mrs. Laing; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. MacDonald; Dr. Massey; Ms Paul; Mr. Shariff; and Mrs. Sloan.

Environment: Mr. Hierath, chairman; Mr. Amery; Mr. Boutilier; Ms Carlson; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Langevin; Mr. Magnus; Dr. Pannu; Mrs. Sloan; Mr. Strang; and Mr. White.

Health and Wellness: Mrs. Tarchuk, chairman; Mr. Broda; Mr. Dickson; Mr. Doerksen; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Herard; Mr. Jacques; Ms Leibovici; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Pham; and Mrs. Sloan.

Human Resources and Employment: Mr. Friedel, chairman; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Gibbons; Mr. Klapstein; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; Mr. McFarland; Ms Paul; Mr. Renner; Mr. Thurber; and Mr. Yankowsky.

Learning: Mr. Stevens, chairman; Mrs. Burgener; Mr. Dickson; Mr. Fischer; Ms Graham; Mr. Hlady; Mr. Johnson; Dr. Massey; Mrs. O'Neill; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Severtson; and Mrs. Soetaert.

[Motion carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Madam Chairman, I would move that the committee rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports the approval thereof. I wish to table for the official records of the Assembly copies of the resolutions agreed to by the Committee of Supply on this date proposing the establishment of four subcommittees of the Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table for the official records of the Assembly copies of the resolutions agreed to by the Committee of Supply on this date proposing the establishment of designated subcommittees of the Committee of Supply.

I would also like to table copies of the letters tabled during the Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly, designating the five designated supply subcommittees by the Official Opposition.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Consideration of Her Honour  
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, 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 you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mr. Dickson]

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand in this Assembly with a response to the Speech from the Throne. I'm very proud to be the representative from the Edmonton-Manning constituency in this Assembly. The Edmonton-Manning constituency is a diverse, urban/rural constituency made up of the maximum-security penitentiary, Alberta Hospital Edmonton, Evergreen mobile park, and the new Northeast health centre.

This was the first Speech from the Throne in the new millennium year 2000 delivered by Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, Lieutenant Governor of our province. What a wonderful Albertan to be chosen for this position. At every function that I have attended at which she has been a guest speaker over the past few years, I've been totally impressed. I haven't heard anything but admiration and praise.

Our province has a strong history since becoming a province in 1905. I have a strong history in this province, with all four sets of great-grandparents having settled in this province prior to it becoming a province.

Madam Speaker, this throne speech isn't about bold plans for the new century. It's a rehash left over from the past century. It's a rehash of announcements that have been made many times before, a rehash of the money that was announced and accounted for in previous budgets. We've heard the promises before: reduce class sizes, improve literacy, plans to ensure the sustainability of the agriculture sector, expand training programs for our youth, long-term care, preventative and community-based health, programs to alleviate housing shortages, reduce poverty and homelessness, and tax relief for Alberta. What's lacking from this government is the commitment to move forward and take action in these areas.

This is also a throne speech of omission. What we have received in the throne speech is the same old stopgap, trickle-down, pressure-point, crisis-reduction approach that this government has followed over the past seven years, with the spin over the past few years from this government: trust us. You know, Albertans are not buying into this anymore.

What are Albertans now thinking about the truth squads? What a mistake this was. I answered a couple of phone calls in my constituency last Friday from seniors who said that they have never voted for anybody but Socreds and the Progressive Conservatives over their voting years. They were very vocal that they went off to Europe to fight in the Second World War against a leader who spoke about pushing the truth squads. In the past few days the calls came in from seniors with concerns about health care and the fact that this government is actually mentioning seniors in their plan as if they weren't residents of this province.

The throne speech talks about increasing financial support to

Alberta's seniors' benefit program to reflect rising costs. This is a positive step. It is a step that is long overdue. But, you know, Madam Speaker, 29 cents isn't a lot. Between 1992-93 and '96-97 this government took \$132 million, or 12 percent, out of the seniors' programs in this province. They shredded seniors' reports and failed to adequately consult with seniors on major changes to seniors' programs. Wouldn't it be nice to provide our 320,000 seniors with a better sense of security and well-being for the future? I would hope that this government is finally realizing that many seniors, some in my constituency, are still on a fixed income.

Madam Speaker, the government is proposing to use Albertans' money to subsidize the profit margin of a few chosen friends while ignoring the needs of 2.9 million Albertans who live throughout this province and pay the bills. The government is back in the business of business subsidies. No government truth squad or propaganda machine will be able to restore this government's vast credibility gap with Albertans on public health and public education.

3:50

Health care. Despite the infusion of \$2 billion since 1995, nothing seems to have changed. Waiting lists for joint replacement are unacceptable. Fewer nurses are employed, and long-term care replacements are stalled. Fewer beds are open. It's like pouring water into a jug with a hole in it. They keep on pouring, but the water keeps leaking out the bottom.

Where's the money going? The truth is that this government has systematically undermined the public health system and created the pain and suffering in order to promote the real agenda – and maybe it's their only agenda – American style health care. The government has opened up the spending taps of Albertans' money in order to siphon off the money to private health operators. They're admitting that private health care is expensive.

Now, mental health is one thing that is really a problem, the unfairness in the funding between the minister of health's and my constituency. The lack of planning for community caregivers versus the institutionalizing of mental health patients is disgraceful. It is shocking to many of us who care a lot about mental health within our province to find that the words weren't even mentioned in the throne speech. This is a huge omission.

We've seen in the last week that this province has come up with an alliance with mental health professionals, the mental health caseworkers community, and advocating groups; in fact, the largest coalition ever formed on the mental health front in Alberta and called Alliance Alberta, the Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health. The organization presented an excellent review of some of the major questions in terms of the government's direction as it comes to mental health.

Now, on the last few trips down into Red Deer it was very concerning that as of March 31 of this year we will be seeing the lack of dollars and any funding going to the Canadian mental association, and all of a sudden workers will be sent out from Ponoka. Isn't it funny? Maybe somebody is creating a kingdom down there.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, it's very concerning. Alberta health is very important in my constituency, and maybe the minister should come into my constituency, which has the largest mental hospital in the province, and start answering some phone calls. Workers in the community are what we need, not putting money into Ponoka.

We have a history of having very strong municipal and school board relations in our province with our provincial government. We



have seen this deteriorate over the last few years. The quality of life within our communities is dependent on the availability of local infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, communities are the backbone of Alberta society. As Albertans we can take justifiable pride in the development of our provincial economy, for we are emerging as leaders among all Canadian provinces in the global economy. Yet while we may compete and prosper in the global economy, we live and work and raise our families in our local communities and neighbourhoods. Our global competitiveness is in the first instance dependent upon the quality of our local environment and the attractiveness of our family life in our towns and cities. Unless our communities are attractive to people, our province will falter. Today our communities face a number of serious challenges. We need leadership which will move us forward to this solution in partnership with local governments.

Mr. Speaker, municipally the quality of life within our communities is dependent on the availability of local infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure is critical to Alberta's future competitiveness, providing the means and adding value to the products and services we produce and sell both here in Canada and abroad. Infrastructure planning should and must be the core business function of the provincial government in close collaboration with our municipalities. The province likes to take the credit for the \$4 billion surplus at the provincial level, but why do they refuse to take responsibility for the infrastructure deficit at the local level? Our municipalities have been subjected to a financial squeeze by the provincial government. Not only were the provincial grants to municipalities reduced; the province also took over access to a portion of the local property base.

Between 1992 and 1998 the general and specific purpose grants from the Alberta government to the municipalities declined by \$402 million, or 48 percent, the second highest level of decline in any province in Canada. Meanwhile, the provincial education property burden on residential properties in Alberta increased by \$87 million, or 13 percent, between 1995 and 1999. The Alberta government collected nearly 46 percent of real general property tax generated in the province in 1998, the third highest percentage among all Canadian provinces.

A constant mill rate which is under the market value assessment is one thing that we could be looking at. I would like to challenge the committee of three MLAs who are studying or should I say tinkering with the mill rate, tinkering with the capping of the education tax. Why don't they just freeze it at a level and then start building it and finding out where it's going to go from there and how in Alberta, as it is a vast province, the market value and education tax will work?

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the absence of leadership Alberta will not reach anywhere near its full potential. However, because of the downloading and offloading by the provincial government for the past seven years, municipalities face hidden infrastructure deficits which they have yet to solve. Our municipalities throughout Alberta deserve to have more than a three-sentence paragraph in the throne speech.

The sentence I like the best says "over the next year." Is this saying that the three-year plan they've been talking about over the last year has only been a spin and now we're back to the one year? We've seen a series of ad hoc measures implemented over the past several months. These measures don't reflect a cohesive view. We repeatedly hear that the present status quo is unsatisfactory. The AUMA and the AAMD and C have been strongly pushing for a five-year business plan. They also have been pushing for some recogni-

tion of the education tax and that the capping, like I said before, was just tinkering.

Mr. Speaker, instead of pointing fingers at other levels of government, the province needs to engage Albertans in a search for new solutions. It's time to acknowledge our local governments as full, mature partners in building Alberta. The old view of municipalities being the children of the province is out of touch with today's reality.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General of Alberta made the following comments on the issue of infrastructure planning.

I believe the quality of the government's capital planning initiative is critical to managing these expenditures in a way that establishes an equilibrium between legitimate program requirements and funding provided. Proper planning will make the difference between a reactive mode, which merely distributes allocated funds, and a predictive mode, which anticipates and justifies funding required.

This was in the Auditor General's report of 1998-99. The Official Opposition believes that Alberta needs a plan in place to ensure that our local governments have adequate access to resources needed to fulfill these responsibilities over the medium and long term.

4:00

You know, Mr. Speaker, these are the challenges. How do we move forward? In our view, we need a new partnership between the province and the local governments based upon respect, fairness, and farsighted views of our future. To accomplish this, we must do three things: develop a comprehensive provincial/municipal agreement or charter that sets out each player's roles, responsibilities, and resources; the second one, find the means to provide municipalities with primary access to the property tax and a long-term, stable, and progressive source of revenue – just think of what Bill 207 is talking about over the next few days; and create an environment in which municipalities are totally accountable to their taxpayers for all sources of revenue and expenses to meet their core responsibilities to engage in long-term planning.

Mr. Speaker, the government needs to move forward as a leader in developing a framework designed to treat local governments as equals, to improve the lines of accountability, and to respect local autonomy and decision-making, to increase co-operation, collaboration, and most importantly to provide stable and predictable funding to our local governments. Constitutional amendments recognized municipalities as our partner, the third level of government in Canada.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I've got a few points or questions to ask around municipalities and to put on the record. When faced with inevitable pressures of growth, can the city of Calgary or other municipalities across the province continue to rely on a system of provincial grants that has proven to be unstable and uncertain? Now, is there a better funding approach that would allow municipalities to meet their roles and more responsibilities? We believe that the time has come for serious consideration of revenue sharing as an alternative to the provincial grants. This is what our private member's Bill 207 is about, and I hope everybody takes note of this, because in other provinces, like Manitoba for example, municipalities are provided with a fixed percentage of personal and corporate income tax based on population. This was something that was brought in in a previous government which was a Conservative government. Tying in the transfers of civic sources of revenue, such as personal income tax, should reduce the fiscal vulnerability arising from the uncertainty over the future grants, particularly the onetime grant programs for infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, as we move on to looking at other things, municipal is very important, but one of the large ones – and we noticed this in

our question period today – is agriculture. After watching the January 31, 2000, TV address, we were able to view the very nice scenic pictures of rural Alberta and our agriculture scene out there, to a degree of 20 percent of the total time on the TV address, paid for by our taxpayers of Alberta. But, you know, it said nothing that particular night. There was nothing said, no promises made to rural Alberta. Then when we were presented with the throne speech, which included 30 percent of the entire delivery talking about rural Alberta, there were no promises, no commitments, no plans for agriculture. Why didn't this government participate in the negotiations with the other provinces, for example Saskatchewan and Manitoba, when they were negotiating with the federals?

The rest of the story has been written in the past few days, Mr. Speaker, nontruths to Alberta's agriculture community. Will rural Alberta buy into this lack of commitment? Only a two-day agriculture summit to be held in June of 2000. I believe this is much too late. The \$100,000 interest free loan is much too late, and is it going to where we need it in northern Alberta, the Peace country, and all the way down along the northeast part of Alberta?

You know, agriculture is a huge part of our history, a huge part of what we should be looking at. We should be fighting very strongly with whatever level of government we have to fight with. It is nice to see that there is being something in the review of hail and crop insurance program.

MRS. SOETAERT: We suggested it.

MR. GIBBONS: We did suggest it. Thank you, my hon. member here.

We support the need to develop a long-range plan that will ensure the sustainability of our agriculture sector and improve the trade rules and market access for industry. We need to continue to work with agriculture sectors to find innovative ways to add value to agriculture products, particularly in the area of agriculture processing. We also need to work with agriculture communities and commercial financial institutions to ensure that there is access to capital to facilitate farming financing and a new transmission of farmers short on loan collateral.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to stress to the government a quote: the time to plan properly is when times are good. Have we missed the fact that times are good in this province right now?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad for this time to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I had been talking to constituents in Edmonton-Centre prior to the throne speech, and I had some opportunity after, as well, to be able to test what people's reaction was and what they were looking to see out of the throne speech. Really what I'm about to speak on is the effect of the government policy on the constituents of Edmonton-Centre and as that is demonstrated to us through the throne speech. So a few different areas I want to focus on: the voluntary sector, health care, mental health, schools, seniors, postsecondary education, and then some other general notes that people gave me.

Interestingly, a lot of head offices for the larger nonprofits are in Edmonton-Centre. Well, not surprisingly; it's the downtown area. There are things like the CNIB, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the United Way. Lots of the large groups have their offices in Edmonton-Centre and are really good about sharing their perspectives with me, as well as a number of smaller ones. Azimuth

Theatre is just around the corner from my office, and that's quite a small organization.

I had asked a question in the House at the end of last week about the voluntary sector. There has been a very thorough and thoughtful report put out by the federal government in which a number of recommendations are made. One of the points they make is that the voluntary sector is really now the third pillar of our society, joining the public sector, in other words government, and the private sector, and certainly I have seen that. As a taxpayer I'm very aware that it's one pocket that's generating all of these taxes. When the federal government downloads onto the province and the province onto the city, the city has nowhere else to download after that except onto these voluntary organizations, and they have taken up a tremendous load of programs and services that were previously offered by one level or another of government.

In the examination of whether these organizations are going to be able to sustain this kind of activity, one of the things that keeps coming up over and over again is capacity building, whether the organizations literally have the technical equipment and know-how to be able to keep up with all of this, and the answer is no. I gleaned through the paragraphs of the throne speech. I looked for an understanding of this, perhaps some assistance that might be coming. That assistance doesn't have to be financial. It can be done through advice, through partnerships, because one of the things that I think government should be doing is providing leadership.

In particular I'm thinking of a board member from a nonprofit organization that said: you know, Laurie, we look to government for leadership. This person was responsible for distributing fairly large amounts of money through one of the private corporations, and they said: well, you know, if government isn't putting money into the nonprofit sector, then we kind of get the hint that nobody is really interested. He felt very strongly that we needed to look to government to show the leadership in that sort of thing. So I'm looking to the government to be showing leadership in helping that voluntary sector be able to support the workload, the programs and services that they have taken on.

4:10

Another point that was raised to me under the heading of voluntary sector is the games. I understand how important games are to cities, to civic pride or provincial pride, to young people, the leadership skills they can learn, the teamwork plus all of the nutrition and wellness factors that are built into it, but I do notice something really interesting. I remember reading an article in which the emissary for the government was going off to put in the bid for the Goodwill Games and speaking of how our arts and cultural sector was going to be the clincher in getting the games here.

I found that in a couple of instances it's no longer enough to be providing the infrastructure, the support for athletic games, whatever kind of athletic games that is. There is an expectation now that for the other people who come to that and to be able to make it a wider, more interesting experience for people, there needs to be a cultural component. So I notice that in fact there is money going into the sports side of things, but having promoted the wonderful arts and cultural sector here, made it a part of the bid, there doesn't seem to be any additional funding going into the arts and cultural sector that indeed helped them clinch the bid, so to speak. I think the same could be said about the 2001 Championships in Athletics. So just a little reminder there.

I know it's convenient to just take pictures of the tens of thousands of people lined up on Gallagher Hill watching the Folk Festival and then use those pictures in wonderful brochures, but those activities do

need support in order to exist enough in the first place to have the tens of thousands of people lined up on the hill.

MR. MacDONALD: We're talking about Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm hearing from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, his pride in having the Edmonton Folk Festival in his riding, and indeed we're all proud of it.

I'd like to go on and talk about health care now. I know that a number of my colleagues have spoken eloquently on this issue, but I'd like to talk specifically about the issues that have been brought forward to my office and to me around this. One of the most serious is about home care waiting lists. I think there has been a deal broken, or at least people feel that they can't trust the government around this issue. When there was a plan – well, I guess the truth is there wasn't a plan. But when there were tremendous cuts in health care in the early '90s, the deal that was put forward at the time was: no problem; yes, you'd be out of the hospital in less than a day or very quickly, but home care would be there for you. Home care would be waiting as soon as you got home.

Well, now we're finding that home care in fact has waiting lists, and really it frightens people. Also, there is a distrust that is building about this government and anything that it says about health care. Here was something that was for sure a done deal, and it's not happening. We have certainly had to make phone calls in my constituency saying that this person has been sent home from the hospital after an operation and there's no family there. They are living alone. There is an isolation factor. We're really concerned and had to sort of advocate and wrestle with the distributors of that in order to get them faster home care.

A corollary to that issue of home care is housekeeping services. Often the services that home care in fact offers are very specific to individual personal care: to help someone get out of bed, to get dressed, perhaps to have a shower or a bath, to eat a meal. But a number of the people who are receiving home care in Edmonton-Centre want to be living in reasonably tidy surroundings, and it doesn't seem that the home care contract covers provision of housekeeping services. People just start to feel that there's something wrong when, you know, they can't get somebody to help them vacuum the floors or the rugs or wash or clean the bathroom. Especially for someone that's not feeling well, this becomes really important, and I think that's an area we need to look at. I am aware that in some cases – and they seem to be fairly restricted cases – minimal housekeeping can be arranged for, but this seems to be an increasing problem for the people in Edmonton-Centre, and I'm hearing more and more about it.

I have raised this point before, but I need to raise it again. With the waiting lists that have been created by the way the government has handled health care, one of the things I see is that people have to wait so long to get the surgery that in fact when they do get the surgery, they're so sick from all of the extra things that happen to someone when you're that sick for that long that they get the surgery and they die. So the operation was a success, but the patient died because they were just so sick from having waited that long. I've had that happen to three people that I know of in my constituency. There's something really wrong with the system when that happens. There are a lot of other things to be said about health care, but I'd like to move on and raise some other points.

Mental health. We estimate that mental health issues are underlying an estimated 80 percent of the cases that we work on in our constituency office. That's a large number. We find often that someone is obviously in distress, needs help, needs someone to go out and talk to them. They need to be able to see and talk to

someone. They need counseling. They need someone to go and check, you know, go into their apartment to try and help them. Is there any food in the fridge? Are there any blankets on the bed? Has anybody been in to see this person or check on them in any way? Even in a downtown area with all those 35,000 people crammed into 20 square blocks, isolation is still a real factor there, and there's no one to refer to. Anywhere that we are able to try and send someone for counseling or for help, their lists are full up. They're jam-packed. Those are the nonprofit groups that are operating, some of the ones that I referred to earlier when I was talking about the voluntary sector taking on programs that government used to provide.

I'm increasingly concerned about this. We cannot find anyone to refer these people to for help, and once again it's a matter of not being able to trust the government anymore. There was a deinstitutionalization of mental health care patients into the community, and the community was willing to take that and welcomed the idea with open arms and worked hard to put structures in place, but that can only be overloaded so long until it can't support itself anymore, and I think that's the point we're at. So we have a long way to go in being able to properly support those people with mental health issues in our community who want to be independent.

I'm aware that we've been waiting for the PDD report, which I think was promised in December. We're now going into the 1st of March later this week. We've waited an awfully long time for this report. We need it. There needs to be much more prevention done around this issue and once again better support for the community organizations that are offering the programs and services. You just can't keep dumping these things on the voluntary sector and expecting that it's somehow free. It isn't. It's cost for the volunteers, and it does cost money to keep the doors open and the lights on.

Oh, there isn't enough time.

I'd like to talk about schools and education. I have been able to speak with some of the teachers and principals in my schools, and you're aware that all of the schools in Edmonton-Centre are classified as inner-city. They're very poor children, and the staff that are working in these schools are absolutely extraordinary in their dedication, their creativity, their initiative to provide everything they can to get these kids moving ahead in life. It is truly inspiring.

A couple of the points that were raised with me were about the Children's Forum report. Big disappointment there. There was no prioritizing that came out of it, no definitive action. As it was put to me: if there had been one statement, even one statement, that said that all schools could have hot lunch programs or that those would be established, that would have been a huge step forward, particularly valuable in the schools that I represent.

4:20

Another point. It's important that we don't lose sight of the funding for full-time kindergarten. One of the things that we were starting to see is that there are some private donor kindergartens – and that's a wonderful thing – where you have an individual who's a philanthropist and puts forward enough money so that someone can run a kindergarten in the area. That doesn't cover all the kindergartens that are in my riding or others' ridings. They kind of get left out. It's important to remember our commitment to that full-time funding for kindergarten.

I cannot repeat often enough how important prevention is for these schools and in all aspects: early prevention, early intervention, early intervention, early intervention. These children are perfectly capable of becoming successful, prosperous, contributing citizens, but they are starting this race from way back in the starting blocks, and they

have got to get help to get them to the starting blocks so that they can run that equal race with everyone else. We have to be aware of that and to work hard on that.

Once again, mild and moderate special-needs funding is still needed. This has not been addressed fully. It's very difficult in my schools to get parent volunteers to fund-raise or even to come in and work in the schools. The parents of these children are working low-income parents. They are working at two or three minimum wage jobs, and each parent is working. They're working hard to keep their head above water and to be proud of what they're contributing. That doesn't leave them any time to be selling almonds door-to-door or Christmas cards or Christmas wrap or whatever else is expected. That's just not a possibility in these schools, and I think we're letting these kids down.

I have about three and a half minutes left and much more to say, so I'll go on to speak about seniors. I was very disappointed in what was brought forward in the budget and as manifest in what was put forward in the throne speech. Once again, immense distrust of this government. What is said and what is done are two very different things. We were hearing about a 10 percent increase for seniors.

Well, in one place I actually did find where it was a 10 percent increase for the Alberta seniors' benefit, which is, in fact, the truth. In other places it was this broad statement about a 10 percent increase for seniors. That simply wasn't true. That's a 10 percent increase for those seniors who are receiving the cash portion of the Alberta seniors' benefit, about 130,000 seniors in Alberta, of which the average is about \$100 a month. So these people are now looking at an increase of \$9 to \$10, 29 cents a day. I'm sorry, but this is not going to address rents that have doubled. This is not going to address phone costs. It is not going to address increased utilities. This is not going to address the cost of gas for transportation or rising food costs. Twenty-nine cents a day is an insult, and I'd say that it was an insult if we didn't need the money so badly for these people. We'll be grateful for that 29 cents, but it's certainly not acceptable.

The special-needs benefit, which is the second part of that, to me demonstrates that the cuts this government made to programs and services that were accessed by seniors has truly had a terrible impact on our seniors in Alberta. That program has had a doubling of the subscription demand in this year, so I think seniors have used up all their savings. They've scrimped and saved and cut everything they can. They've borrowed from their family. They've done everything they can, and they've reached the point where there's no more meat left on that bone. There's no other place to get it from, and they've had to go cap in hand to this government saying: please can I get special-needs benefit money for a winter coat? A winter coat, winter boots.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's shameful. That's shameful. They laugh on that side. They think that's funny.

MS BLAKEMAN: I don't know why they would laugh. If they think it's funny that seniors have to go and beg for money for a winter coat, it's a sad situation in Alberta.

MR. DUNFORD: Tell the truth. Tell the truth.

MS BLAKEMAN: That is the truth, and I've got the casework to prove it. Those are the people that have come to me. I'm not going to stand here and make things up. What for? I've got enough cases to talk for days up here.

I think we need to look at funding of seniors' centres. That is a preventative measure, and a penny of prevention is worth millions

of dollars in cure. If we're going to end up spending 1,200 bucks a day in an acute care bed for a senior who could have been participating in wellness sessions, in activities, in meals, breaking that isolation through a seniors' centre, I think we seriously need to look at funding seniors' centres. This is prevention. It's going to save us a lot of money down the road.

We also need to be looking at affordable housing for seniors and others, once again looking to the government to provide leadership in developing these policies, not just dumping it on some other sector.

I also want to talk about postsecondary students. I represent Grant MacEwan Community College, NorQuest, Alberta College – and I'm out of time. There's far too much to say.

If I can please adjourn this debate.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. No, hon. member, you cannot. The time expired for your speaking.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: I'd move adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Motions

#### Provincial Fiscal Policies

15. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 24: Mr. Dickson]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be privileged to address the budget which was brought down in the Assembly last Thursday by the Provincial Treasurer, and I'm pleased to look at some of the issues in that budget that we think are important and perhaps some lost opportunities in that budget that, frankly, we were looking for as we proceeded through the debate. I know that the Provincial Treasurer spent a good deal of time practising the speech. He certainly had some interesting stunts around the speech, but I think there have been some issues of a pretty fundamental political nature that are perhaps some mistakes that this government made in that budget. We only had to listen to some of the people that feel they have lost touch with the government they elected as we listened to their comments and their concerns about the budget and the things the budget forgot to do.

You know, it's a pretty fundamental law of politics that you always respect that core group of people that support a political party, respect the people that have done all the legwork to get that party to where it is, and to ignore that group and the growing numbers of that group as it gets to close to its 30th year in power is one that presumably those people will have a chance to respond to when the next election comes around. So, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do today is to identify some of those groups that feel that this government has lost touch with the things that they're saying, the things that matter to them, the people who put this government where it is.

I would like to start right off the bat with the whole issue of tax cuts, Mr. Speaker. Really, it's interesting to go back in the history of this government over its last eight years and realize that the only way that taxes have gone in Alberta over those eight years is up: \$54 million from over 400 new or increased user fees between '92-93 and

2001-02, a \$236 million increase in health care premium taxes between '92 and 2000, a \$333 million increase from video lottery terminal taxes between '93 and 2003, \$164 million in casino gaming terminal taxes between '93 and 2003, \$204 billion in cumulative revenues collected from Albertans as a result of the provincial personal income tax bracket creep between '93 and 2000, and a \$181 million increase in education property taxes between '92 and 2003. That's a total of \$3.4 billion in tax increases by this government, undertaken or planned or promised by the Klein government between '92 and 2002. So who has the government lost touch with in this very, very important area?

4:30

Well, the government has lost touch with those hardworking Alberta families who were waiting for the announcement of a tax cut last Thursday, a tax cut that would have affected them directly. But, no, the tax cut announced last Thursday was the tax cut affecting only 25 percent of Alberta taxpayers, and that was with the elimination of the surtax on the 8 percent for the high-income level. Nothing for the hardworking families in terms of the tax cut they deserve, Mr. Speaker, deserve because of what they've been through over the past eight years with this government in terms of fees, taxes, and the impact of budget cuts on them all.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I said that the Provincial Treasurer had practised his lines, obviously, as he delivered that speech last Thursday. While the government talks and teases Albertans about tax cuts, in fact it hasn't come up with the results, and that's what people are saying, the people who feel this government has lost touch with them, those people in that middle group who are so essential to our family life, the working families within our province.

Let's look at the record, Mr. Speaker, over the last four months. We went back and looked at the teasing and the taunting that's been done to Albertans. On November 23 last year the Premier said that the government might lower the 9 cents per litre gasoline tax; that is, he might. He mused about that. On November 25, two days later, the Premier mused about a gasoline tax rebate. On December 29 the Premier talked about providing Albertans with a \$100 rebate for everyone right across the province. On January 7 the Treasurer said that the government was considering a personal income tax cut in the year 2000. On January 17 the Treasurer said that the government was considering a reduction in health care premiums. On January 18 the Treasurer said that the surplus would be used to pay down the debt rather than being used to cut taxes in 2000.

Talk about tax policy-making on the fly, Mr. Speaker. That's why Albertans feel that this government has lost touch with them and the things that matter to them. So that's a pretty important part about the taxes. It's one that certainly the people phoning in to those radio shows are concerned about, that this government talks about tax cuts but not one that's affecting them this year.

Let's move on and look at education property taxes in this province. Why did the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer tell Albertans to expect substantial tax relief on their property taxes in the current fiscal year and then proceed to announce a property tax cut that amounts to about \$31.50 for an average Calgary homeowner and \$22.50 for an average homeowner in Edmonton? How can the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer call an 18-cent reduction in the education property mill rate a tax cut when the facts are that provincial revenues from education property tax imposed by the province will actually increase by \$18 million in 2000 and 2001 and between now and 2003 education property taxes are projected to increase by \$48 million? That's a tax increase, Mr. Speaker, plain and simple, no matter how their spin-and-duck tactics on communications try to say otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, let's move, then, to the flat tax. What have we seen so far on this 11 percent flat tax scheme? Well, in the first instance what we've seen is that it's been announced on 14 different occasions but still hasn't been delivered on. A \$160 million tax cut that applies to only 25 percent of taxpayers through the elimination of the 8 percent tax, as I said earlier, is the only cut that is going to take effect this year. So, again, all about the spin and the ducking.

Let's look at that flat tax, Mr. Speaker. The middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, with an income category of between \$30,000 and \$70,000, will receive an average of a 9 percent cut in their provincial taxes under the Klein flat tax when in fact it comes in, if it comes in, but the top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class of \$150,000 and above, will receive a tax cut of 18 percent in their provincial taxes under the Klein flat tax. So who benefits, and who benefits the most? The people in that high-income level, interestingly the very people who are going to benefit from the federal government's action on tax cuts in this fiscal year, not the hardworking Alberta families that were waiting for some relief in this budget.

Let's look at the impact of the Klein flat tax on marginal rates, Mr. Speaker, a very interesting thing which the Provincial Treasurer doesn't like to talk about, but let's examine it. Marginal rates for the province are rates of tax that an individual pays on the last one dollar earned, as we all know. The marginal tax rate for taxpayers with taxable income in the low-income bracket – in other words, those paying 17 percent at the federal level, which comprises 52 percent of Alberta taxpayers – is higher under the Klein flat tax proposal than under the current tax system. In other words, that provincial marginal rate is currently 7.48 percent for those Albertans that are paying at the 17 percentile of the federal tax. That 7.48 has to go up to a marginal rate of 11 percent under the flat tax. There's no denying that the provincial marginal rate will go up for those least able to pay on the tax side.

Let's look at the marginal tax rate for taxpayers with taxable income in that middle-income bracket, Mr. Speaker, those that are paying at 26 percent. That's 35 percent of our taxpayers in this province, and it is essentially the same, interestingly, under the Klein flat tax as under the current tax system of tax on tax. In other words, it will go from, at the current rate, 11.44 percent to 11 percent.

But most interesting, Mr. Speaker, is to look at the marginal tax rates for that group at the high-income level, those paying at the 29 percent federal rate, which comprises only 13 percent of Alberta taxpayers. Under the new Klein flat tax proposal yet to come, the tax adjustment will be from 12.76 as a provincial marginal rate down to 11 percent.

So who benefits, Mr. Speaker? The high-income group benefits. The middle-income working Alberta families and those at the lower end either get a saw-off or they get a substantial increase in that provincial marginal rate. That's what's behind all of this, and that's something Albertans understand, and that's why they feel this government has lost touch with them.

Let me move on, Mr. Speaker, to municipalities, another group that feels that the provincial government has lost touch with them, perhaps because they've been in power for almost 30 years. But most recently, in the last eight years, municipalities through their municipal associations, like the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, have spoken out very strongly against this budget. Our communities are in fact the backbone of Alberta society. We work, we raise our families, and we live in our neighbourhoods within these communities, and the quality of life within our communities is very much dependent on the availability of local infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure is critical to Alberta's future competitiveness, providing a means of adding value to the products and the services that we produce and sell both here in Canada and abroad. Infrastructure should be and must

be a core business function of a provincial government in close collaboration with our municipalities.

But let's look at what has happened, Mr. Speaker. This province announces close to a \$4 billion surplus, but municipalities can't get the long-term predictable funding formula which they have been asking for year over year over year from this government. Between '92 and '98 general and specific purpose grants from Alberta government to municipalities declined by 48 percent, the second highest level of decline of any province in Canada. Meanwhile, of course, as we've noted, the provincial education property tax burden has risen by 13 percent between '95 and '99.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a series of ad hoc measures implemented by the province over the past year: two announcements of onetime infrastructure funding, a 5 cent per litre fuel tax grant to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, and in the budget the government announced the acceleration of this \$475 million in funding for transportation in 2001. While these measures are both welcome and overdue, they do not reflect the realities of today, the need to create a stable, sustainable, long-term funding arrangement between the province and local governments to support a system of comprehensive infrastructure planning.

In its response to the provincial budget the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association made the following comments: "an increase in the infrastructure dollars for municipalities is welcome news, however, short term funding is no substitute for long term planning," and "the Government still has not addressed the need for long-term financial solutions," an indictment, Mr. Speaker, by the municipalities of this province.

Let's move on, then, to the Auditor General of Alberta, who made the following comments on this whole issue of infrastructure planning when he said that

capital expenditures do not occur in isolation – they create a stream of subsequent operating costs that are often not fully recognized at the time of the original investment . . . I believe the quality of the government's capital planning initiative is critical to managing these expenditures in a way that establishes an equilibrium between legitimate program requirements and the funding provided. Proper planning will make the difference between a reactive mode, which merely distributes allocated funds, and a predictive mode, which anticipates and justifies funding required.

Even the Auditor General is trying to point the way for this government. He said at the end, "At present, there is not enough performance reporting to usefully assist in capital asset management."

Mr. Speaker, we in the Official Opposition believe that Alberta needs a plan to replace and ensure that our local governments have adequate access to the resources they need in order to carry out the responsibilities that have been downloaded by this government. To accomplish this, we believe we need a new partnership, a new vision between the province and local government based on respect, on fairness, and on a farsighted view of the future, not just dangling the carrot in front of the municipalities. The municipalities are saying: no, it's not good enough anymore; this government has forgotten us.

We believe we need to develop a comprehensive provincial/municipal agreement that sets out each player's roles, responsibilities, and resources, a commitment, Mr. Speaker, a long-term commitment, a respect for another level of government to say: this is what we need. We believe that we need to find a means to provide municipalities with primary access to the property tax base and long-term, stable, and progressive sources of revenue that will respect the importance of their role in the life of our province.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of that, we will be bringing forward a bill which will be an example of a way that we believe is this govern-

ment's point of view when it comes to municipalities, of the municipalities being the children of the province, a view that was expressed back in the mid-70s, which this government is still following. That bill will consider a revenue-sharing alternative to the provincial grant model that this government depends on, the dangling carrot, and tying the transfers, as other provinces have done, to specific sources of revenue. A very small first step was made with the fuel tax for Edmonton and Calgary, but it is a small one, and it's one that needs to be built on for all municipalities in this province, not just the big cities.

In conclusion with the municipalities, Mr. Speaker, this is a provincial government that has lost touch with our local governments, with their aspirations, has forgotten the importance of a partnership role with our municipalities, a partnership that we in the Official Opposition believe is fundamental to getting on with in fact new ways, a new vision for the future in a new century.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I would like to go to the issue of education. In this sector of the budget the provincial government has lost touch with the parents, with the teachers, with the students in postsecondary education, has lost touch with the very people who depend on this government to be recognizing their needs, their responsibilities, and thanking them for the work they've done over the last several years while there have been cuts. Now infusions of cash, which I think the government thought particularly the basic education people might have responded to by saying: oh, thank you very much for all this new money.

But, you know, our parents, our teachers, our people involved and committed to public education in this province could see through the smoke screen, and they saw through the smoke screen in very short order. Out in the lobby of this Legislature, with the communications plan that the government set up – and it was actually very good. I thought the way we were able to talk to all of the groups at once in the foyer was actually very good. But what they were saying in that foyer when it came to basic education is that this is a government that gave dollars for student growth in population and inflation, but there's really nothing in the budget to address the primary concern of parents, and that is the basic per pupil funding, the dollars that need to be there for creating smaller classes in our province.

So Albertans are getting smarter than this government is, because they're starting to see through the government, reluctantly dragged kicking and screaming, throwing a bit of money at them. What they want, particularly in the area of education, is that those dollars are going to be sustainable, that they are going to be able to see some effect on classroom sizes. We even saw the lateral arabesque performed by the Minister of Learning today. When asked about the 2,200 new teachers that were going to be coming onstream – and I'm paraphrasing, Mr. Speaker – he said: oh, no, no; it's not really any 2,200 new teachers. He said: that's one example of what school boards might want to do. Gee, a whole different message.

Then compare that to attending education forums in this city, where 500 parents would be out at an education forum and the minister is standing up and saying, as he did today, that educators, even those in the States, are saying that 17 pupils in a classroom from K to 3 is the optimum number, and that's a really good thing. He let all those parents think he was actually going to do something about K to 3 and reduce the number of kids in those classes, but he didn't. He didn't, and now he's calling it something that some of the school boards might want to do.

You know what? I talked to principals who told me: "You know what I can do with the dollars I've received? I might be able to buy some of the textbooks I need. I can't hire another teacher. I'm going to have even bigger classes next year." So, you know, let's call a spade a spade.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the future, we have been thinking very seriously about this issue of classroom sizes and always have. In fact, there was a motion in 1998 on classroom sizes, and of course we will be bringing forward another motion this year about targeting that 17 in the K to 3 level. Also, we have a plan that would say that there would be a full, tuition-free 475 hours of kindergarten, essential for an early foundation for our kids and an early detection of problems. Clearly that was a recommendation made in the Children's Forum, both the kindergarten and the class size, but of course there was nothing on that in this government's budget.

It's no wonder Albertans get frustrated when they hear their words, you know, thrown back at them by the Children's Forum report and then the opportunity to see real action on the part of the government is just ignored. They hear their words in the good PR message of the Children's Forum report, but when it comes to the action, things this government could do to put those things into play, it's not there, and Albertans are getting tired of it, Mr. Speaker.

We need a new vision for basic education into the new millennium. In fact, we need a new vision for the future of education in the new millennium. That's why we are going to be talking about a new commission to look at the future of education in Alberta, one that looks at early childhood learning, early detection of problems in learning, works with kids through the basic level, reduces those deficits in their own learning through the basic level, has them graduate from high school with strong opportunity to go into public institutions at the postsecondary level, to be good citizens, and then move on to the postsecondary level beyond. Regardless of all else, education has to be the first priority of any provincial government.

4:50

I do want to make some remarks as well about postsecondary education, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary is another area that really feels they have been forgotten by this government. While there's the \$3 million academic scholarship program, the \$17 million for remission on student loans, and the \$16 million to pay the risk premiums to banks, there is still showing that between '95-'96 and '98-'99 the average student debt load increased from \$15,518 to \$17,360, an increase of 12 percent for our students at the postsecondary level.

Tuition fees as revenue, as a percent of funding for credit programs, has increased from 14.9 percent in '93 to 21 percent in '98. In other words, with the cutbacks towards the postsecondary institutions, tuition is taking a larger and larger part in fund-raising for our postsecondary institutions. As a result, the average university tuition fee in Alberta is now over \$3,100 per student, one of the highest levels in Canada. Shocking, appalling, Mr. Speaker, in a province that boasts of close to a \$4 billion surplus.

Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of postsecondary education is a very big issue, and what this government has lost touch with are those families who see an ever increasing rise in tuition, those hardworking Alberta families who wonder whether or not they're going to be able to ensure that their kids go on to postsecondary education. What an indictment of this government and what a forgotten group, who will in fact be the source of our prosperity as we move into the next century.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to the whole issue of health care. In no other area, I would say, has this government not only lost trust with the people of the province, but they have in fact broken the trust with the people in this province when it comes to health care. This is the government that inherited a cost-controlled health care system in this province when they took over in '92, this is the government that rapidly cut out close to 20 percent of that health care sector, and this is the same government that now,

realizing the error of their ways, is throwing money back at health care, trying to buy back support from the people of this province. And you know what? Albertans aren't buying it.

I would like to challenge any of these MLAs to have been in the seat of their colleague from Lacombe-Stettler on Saturday while she tried to defend this government. It's no wonder she raised those questions in this Legislature today, Mr. Speaker, because she's got the heat coming from her constituents, people who say: will she resign? That's what they asked. Would she resign if this government, as we all know full well they are headed towards doing, rams through this legislation?

The truth is that Albertans do not trust this government when it comes to health care. It is so abundantly clear. If the government, instead of avoiding and ignoring what Albertans are saying, would go out there and listen to those people on the steps of the Legislature at noon today, if they would go to the forums right across this province and listen to what Albertans are saying, if they would read their own correspondence, they would see what Albertans are saying. Albertans are saying – you know what? After roundtables, after blue-ribbon panels, after growth summits, after health summits, after trying to introduce this legislation on two occasions, you know what, government? Albertans don't believe you. They don't believe them anymore. That's what they're facing, a credibility gap. It has nothing to do with communication.

You know, Mr. Speaker, they think they're so clever, because they're going to come in and try and fudge their way through the legislation, have something they think is innocuous. But you know what? They're not going to be able to do it. No matter what kind of legislation they bring in, Albertans know that their real agenda, whether it's expressed today or expressed the day after the next election, is the privatization of health care. They see it as the solution. We're going to stand up and fight for public health care, and we're going to do it through the next election.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things money can't buy. It can't buy trust, and it's what they're trying to do. This is the 16th separate funding announcement since September of '95, with nearly \$2 billion thrown at the system they broke. This is day 1,611. Remember the Ralph Klein 90-day plan? There's no wonder Albertans don't trust this government. They don't trust this government to manage the health care system now. They don't trust this government, whatever kind of legislation they bring in. Albertans want to see the provincial government ensuring that public dollars are going to go to public health care. You know, people right across this province – it's amazing – understand, they know that the flow of dollars is from their pockets into a regional health authority and then diverted over to a private-sector operator. It is a subsidy of private operators. They are back in the business of being in business and back to paying taxpayers' dollars to subsidize it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to participate in this budget debate and to point out the number of ways that this government has lost touch with the people of this province because they've become arrogant, because they have forgotten that it's not their money, that it's Albertans' money. Albertans care about the future of this province. They care about their families, they care about their seniors, they care about their kids needing postsecondary education, and they care about their local municipalities, all those things that this government takes for granted. The day of reckoning is coming. A day will come soon when this government will finally understand what it is that Albertans are saying and what they care about and what they're feeling.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to participate in this debate. I look forward to hearing the ministers defend their own budgets, the gaps in their budgets. Certainly our caucus has been working hard

over the weekend and will continue to do so as we challenge the ministers to support their budgets.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this budget.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak on Budget 2000. I note that the budget is presented in a very interesting way, as *New Century: Bold Plans*. I've been reading the budget documents very closely to find out what those plans are, how carefully thought through they are, and what the time span is over which they stretch. I don't plan to start coming to these conclusions right away, but one thing that seems to be a pattern from looking at the budget documents is clearly that the time span or the planning, if we can call it planning, seems to be done for a maximum of three years.

5:00

We're talking about the new century. We're talking about transforming this society, this society which is most highly educated, which enters the so-called information age, which therefore will be committed to providing opportunity across to young people, across income levels, opportunity they see as equal, not more opportunity for those who happen to be born into families with large incomes and limited and vanishing opportunity for those who are unfortunate enough to have parents with low incomes, unsteady jobs, or multiple jobs with very, very low wage rates attached to them.

Mr. Speaker, before I get to that, I think the overall impression that one can't help but get from reading the budget is that this may be the current Provincial Treasurer's last hurrah as Treasurer, that he may be getting ready to jump the provincial ship and try and move elsewhere. This is in a sense an agenda they would like to sell nationally in pursuit of his new dreams, and I wish him good luck on it. What kind of a legacy this Treasurer will leave for the province, for its children, for its seniors, for its educational institutions, for its teachers is a question that we all must ask, because the Treasurer holds the key to the available revenues, the resources of the province. How those resources are to be allocated to priorities clearly a government in power has to define, and hopefully those priorities should reflect the hopes and dreams and the needs of Albertans. If the Premier's plans to introduce a flat tax regime becomes a reality, I think the Treasurer's legacy will be one of a less fair and less compassionate Alberta.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I must also note that the budget presented in the first week of the sitting instead of the second or third week, which is a long-standing tradition, simply reflects the hurry that the Treasurer finds himself in. He wanted to presumably outwit and outsmart the federal budget and the Finance Minister in Ottawa, and then in his desire to do this, he left open the possibility that he'll have to make adjustments to the budget that he just presented a few days ago once the federal budget comes in. I was at the Premier's press conference this afternoon, and already we find that the Premier is now saying that he's going to throw an extra hundred million dollars into the health care budget, while their own budget hasn't quite dried up. So that tells you something about the sort of strange way in which the presentation of the provincial budget has a sequence in relation to the federal budget and the kind of problems that it inevitably creates.

The federal budget announced today is an interesting document in itself. The announcement in the federal budget means that the

Alberta budget presented last week is already, as I said, out of date. So instead of waiting for the budget to come down so that the necessary adjustments to the provincial budget could be made, the government chose to let the Provincial Treasurer bring his budget down first for no other reason than to upstage the federal government and the federal Liberals.

There's no doubt, no question that the Treasurer's time in office has been marked by a strong economy thanks to the OPEC success in controlling the supply of oil internationally thereby raising the prices of oil sky-high. Gas prices have been high as well, so certainly he's hit a lucky stretch over the last few years. Since our economy is so energy centred, every other economic activity in the province reflects the sort of buoyant nature of the oil and gas markets at the moment. This good fortune has resulted in a sort of so-called embarrassment of riches flowing into the provincial Treasury for this government, which only until last year or two years ago were talking about: we can't afford this; we can't afford that.

The affordability was the mantra they were using. All of a sudden you find today that there's not any concern about affordability, but the Treasurer has been trying to play Santa Claus now to just about everyone. He has the flexibility of course to reduce taxes – the question is, "Who benefits from the tax reductions," and that, I'll come to in a moment – to address spending priorities while simultaneously paying down the debt.

What Albertans have to judge is the fairness of this government's approach in addressing these priorities: social, economic, educational, and others, as well as fiscal priorities. I respectfully submit to you, Madam Speaker, that this government's approach does not meet the test of fairness either.

Let me start with this government's wrongheaded flat tax. Stockwell Day's flat tax represents an unprecedented transfer of the provincial tax load from the wealthy onto the backs of middle-class Albertans. This unfair and complicated flat tax is nothing more than a handout to the wealthy paid for by working Albertans. The Provincial Treasurer claims that he will cut provincial income tax by an average of 15 percent next year. The key word here is "average," not that everyone will experience a 15 percent cut but an average.

What he fails to point out is the unfair distribution of these tax cuts. In fact, according to the government's own budget documents, some middle-income Albertans will actually face a tax increase due to the introduction of a flat tax. For example, the government's own documents show that a single person making \$30,000 a year will actually face a tax increase of some \$28. This simply isn't fair, but this government doesn't seem to be about fairness. It doesn't seem to be concerned about equality. It doesn't seem to be concerned about just and fair policies.

Meanwhile, for the second straight year the government has refused to calculate tax savings at income levels above \$100,000. Albertans are curious and wonder why. Why is it, Madam Speaker, that the government wouldn't calculate tax savings at levels above \$100,000 and show them in its own documents? Well, the answer is fairly clear. Because it would expose the flat tax for what it really is: massive tax breaks for those with incomes over \$100,000 totaling thousands of dollars per year, nonexistent tax savings for the middle class, in some cases actual tax increases.

I'll point out one thing, Madam Speaker. Lower and middle-class Albertans would have been better off had they stayed linked to the federal tax brackets over the next five years rather than being subjected to the Provincial Treasurer's regressive flat tax. They would have at least some tax reductions, whereas under this government's flat tax some middle-income earners will actually see their taxes go up.



5:10

Instead of forcing Alberta families to pay for giant gifts to the wealthy, the New Democrats proposed – but the government wouldn't listen – that this government should eliminate health care premiums. With one stroke of the pen the government could put \$816 annually in the pockets of every working family in Alberta while forgoing a comparable amount of revenue.

Health care premiums are the worst kind of flat tax, the most unfair flat tax that could be found anywhere. You pay the same \$816 per year regardless of whether your family income is \$20,000 a year or \$200,000 a year. Health care premiums are also costly to administer and place an unfair burden on seniors and those employed in lower paying jobs without benefits. The cost of collecting defaulted premium payments in itself runs into several millions of dollars a year. No one benefits from it except the collection agencies and companies.

So it's a flat tax that's unfair. It's expensive to administer. It leads to wastage of public revenues in the collection from those who cannot pay. Yet this government wouldn't consider eliminating, scrapping, this unfair flat tax and thereby benefiting a large majority of Albertans, all Alberta families who now have to pay \$816 a year regardless of their income levels.

I want to mention a couple of other items on the revenue side of the budget before proceeding to the expenditure side. One has to do with net profits from gambling, which are estimated to go up again to \$838 million. This amount is \$200 million more than the government estimates they will take in from conventional oil royalties. On a per capita basis the Alberta government extracts by far the highest amount of money from addicted gamblers of any Canadian province. The government has maxed out VLTs in bars and hotels. So what does it do? It allows a massive expansion of electronic slot machines in casinos. It introduces new forms of gambling like keno and high stakes poker. This government's gambling addiction is taking a growing toll on Alberta's families and communities.

The other revenue item that bears mentioning is the continuing giveaway called the Alberta royalty tax credit. This tax credit will cost the government an estimated \$200 million next year. Can anyone recall why we still have this corporate welfare holdover from the 1980s? How can we justify singling out the oil and gas industry for special tax breaks not available to other economic sectors? How can we justify giving \$200 million a year to the energy industry during a period of near record oil and gas prices and, by implication, near record, unprecedented corporate profits in this sector?

The fact is that this kind of corporate welfare can no longer be justified. The royalty tax credit should have been scrapped, but it has not been. I think Albertans are asking why this government feels itself so beholden to this particular economic sector, industrial sector, that it doesn't have the courage to save Albertans this \$200 million a year, that those companies don't need, that cannot be justified, and that we can use to good effect to reduce the class size in a classroom or help our seniors pay their ever increasing costs, whether it be rental costs, whether they are utility costs, whether these are property taxes, so that seniors could live their last years in dignity in this province.

On the expenditure side of the budget, Madam Speaker, the government has followed through on previously announced increases for health care and education. While the general increase that's being indicated here is welcome, we need to look more closely at how these increases will be phased in and whether or not they'll be adequate to address the pressing needs caused by the government's own thoughtless policy over the last six or seven years.

The federal Finance minister also announced today a significant

increase in transfers to the provinces for health and education. Will the government be adding the increased federal transfer to the health budget for next year? If so, where will these additions go? Will they go into private, for-profit hospitals and the hands of their owners, or will they be retained within our publicly funded hospitals, where we need to open new beds, where we need to decrease pressure on our frontline workers, and where we need to reduce the pressure in our emergency rooms?

The increased funding for health care announced in the budget should not be wasted on costly privatization experiments, Madam Speaker. Private, for-profit health care costs more and delivers less. The evidence of this fact, both in Alberta and worldwide, is overwhelming. The Premier is simply wrong when he says that there are studies on both sides of this question. There are not. Market medicine does not work. If privatization were the way to go in health care, the U.S. would have the lowest cost health care system in the world, but of course they don't. The U.S. spends about 50 percent more per capita on health care than any other western developed country, including Canada. Meanwhile, more than one and a half times the population of Canada in the U.S., close to 44 million Americans, are at any given time in any given year without health insurance and health coverage. Another 100 million Americans are underinsured.

While this government proposes to expand private, for-profit involvement in health care, other countries are moving in the opposite direction. Countries like Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore all made forays into market medicine during the past 15 years. In New Zealand right now the present government has abandoned the contracting-out policy because it miserably failed over the last 10 years. It has been reversing completely the trend that was set many years ago, but they're finding that once the genie is out of the bottle, it's very hard to get the genie back in. Governments that try to displace commercial interests face lawsuits and other obstacles. As a matter of fact, the New Zealand government is facing such expenditures right now.

Madam Speaker, there are some hon. members who want to take the floor, and I'd be very happy, if they so wanted, to give them priority here.

There is absolutely no jurisdiction, Madam Speaker, for the contracting out of major surgeries requiring inpatient care to private, for-profit hospitals. I see the hon. minister asking me to sit down. I guess he doesn't want to hear the truth. I'm not surprised about that, because they have truth squads out there trying to exterminate the truth, not listen to the truth.

The government scheme also overlooks the fact that hospital costs are declining compared to other areas of health expenditure. In 1975 45 cents out of every health care dollar went to hospitals.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. Your time is up.

DR. PANNU: All right, Madam Speaker. If the time is up, I'll sit down.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene at 8 p.m., we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion by the hon. Government House Leader.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. The Assembly stands adjourned until 8 this evening, when it will reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]