

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 14, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 54 people, mostly women, urging the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present that says:

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

It's signed by 221 residents from Hinton, Alberta.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 200 residents of Hinton urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to present a petition signed by 200 residents of the Hinton and Jasper area who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to stop the promotion of private health care and the undermining of our public health care system.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table today a petition signed by 236 residents of the city of Lethbridge, and they're calling on

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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the two petitions I presented previously be now 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.

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 Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition signed by 292 Calgarians that I presented yesterday be now read and received, please.

Thank you.

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-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd rise to respectfully request that the petition I presented yesterday be now 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-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now request that the petition which I tabled earlier this week in the Assembly regarding the government's undermining of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly be now 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.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 94 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented Wednesday, March 8 of this year, and I can advise the House that all of those petitions comply with Standing Orders 85 through 89.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and replace their places with the exception of motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 17.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 16
Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 16, being the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000.

This act fine-tunes and clarifies existing condominium law and allows for greater flexibility without eroding the consumer protection it affords.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 16 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 1998 radiation protection program annual report.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I request leave to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter sent by myself to the Hon. Allan Rock. The letter outlines rather thoroughly our opposition to some of the remarks made in a recent speech in Calgary.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 11 letters and e-mails that I've received. They are from Calgary, Medicine Hat, Vegreville, Red Deer, Westeros, and Edmonton. All of the writers of these letters are opposed to Bill 11 and other forms of privatization of the public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to table this afternoon the requisite number of copies of a report that confirms that private MRI clinics were not in operation prior to May 1993.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the appropriate number of copies of a report that is titled Klein Praises Block Funding. In responding to the reduction of federal transfer payments, the Premier said that this allows us to be more flexible; remove the strings; give us the money; we can manage it.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a report I'd like to table that states that Premier Klein says that he's considering letting investors buy hospitals in the province and run them as money-making private facilities: give us a proposal; we're willing to consider anything.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to table the requisite number of copies of a report. What's considered a nonessential health service may vary from one region to another, says Premier Ralph Klein.

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

1:40

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to table a report with regards to some comments made by the former Treasurer of Alberta and current chair of the Calgary regional health authority, Mr. Dinning, wherein he said that hospitals should be built, owned, and operated by private businesses.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a report called Health Care Up For Sale? in which the Premier indicates that profit-making health care would not exclude foreigners that wanted to pay full price.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a report in which the Premier is advising day cares, hospitals, and universities to look at having bingos and raffles to offset provincial budget cuts.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a report in which the Premier indicated that Alberta hospitals might be allowed to market their services inside and outside the province as a way to raise cash.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here. One is the growth of private, nonhospital surgical facilities in Alberta under this Premier. It's up by 49 percent.

The other one is five copies of this nonhospital surgical facilities listing, copies of that as well.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies where it indicates that the Premier wants to market health care and also where he says that there's an opportunity for some entrepreneurship in the health care business.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I rise to present the requisite number of copies of a report that outlines the concerns raised by Calgarians and the millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that was spent on hospital construction and equipment just prior to the demolition and/or sale of those hospitals. It contains a quote by the MP from Calgary, Jason Kenney, then the head of the Association of Alberta Taxpayers: it was stupid planning and bad planning not to have frozen projects at the time.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a report from the Premier in which he says that private hospitals should be allowed to expand in Alberta.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I also would like this afternoon to table a report. In it the Premier states: Jane Fulton is calling a spade a spade, and I don't think that's reason to cause fear in the minds of the Alberta public.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly some very distinguished representatives from the condominium industry. These people represent both owners and developers of condominiums, and they were a part of a working committee established last summer to help develop the legislation that was tabled moments ago as Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000. This piece of legislation, that has had its fair share of controversy over the past four years, has been instrumental in bringing forward a group of people to resolve these difficulties, and I believe quite frankly that if they hadn't come together, we wouldn't be able to introduce the amendments that we introduced today.

So I'd like to thank them and introduce them to this Assembly. Seated in the members' gallery are Greg Christenson, the chair of the Alberta Home Builders' Association Condominium Act Task Force; Grant Ainsley, the executive director of the Alberta Home Builders' Association; Marc Bateman, the president of the south Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute and a national board member; Deborah Howes, the director of the north Alberta chapter of the Condominium Institute; Dennis Little, president and chief executive officer of the Alberta home warranty program; Victoria Archer, member of the north Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute; Sky Wensel, Q.C., counsel for the Alberta home warranty program. Also joining us are Diane Bush, president of the Alberta Home Builders' Association and marketing director of First National Properties. And last but definitely not least I'd like to introduce the person whose task it was to actually put Bill 16 together: Frances Cruden, legislative adviser

with consumer and corporate services division in my department. I'd like all these people to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today it is a distinct honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 17 visitors who are seated in the members' gallery from Sherwood Park United Church. They are with their leaders today George and Norma Campbell and also Sheila McLachlin. I would ask all of us to give them our warm appreciation for their visit, in some cases their first visit here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly eight students from the Dr. Swift middle school in Lac La Biche. The students are accompanied today by teacher Mrs. Linda Johnson and also two teacher aides, Ms Shauna Hannin and Ms Andrea Fries. I would like to ask our visitors to please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon 44 students, two teachers, and seven parents from Hardisty junior high. The group is led by Mrs. Loughheed. It is noteworthy to all hon. members of this Assembly that she has a very soft spot in her heart for one of our members, the very distinguished hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. The other teacher is Mr. Foo. Parents helping out today are Mrs. Diane Franke, Mrs. Judy Ekkelenkamp, Mrs. Joy Johnston, Mrs. Farrant, Mrs. Foerger, Mrs. Gaudin, and Mrs. Milton. These students I believe are in both galleries, and if they would now rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would be grateful.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Today I have the distinct pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a group that I think is very interested in what's happening. However, they won't be coming in until 2 o'clock, and they will be leaving before question period is over. I'd like to have it on the record that they were warmly welcomed by the Legislative Assembly. They're a group of students from Little Buffalo school from Little Buffalo, Alberta, and they are accompanied by three staff: Mr. Darsh Ramrattan, Mr. Wayne Fabing, and teacher assistant Arleyne Noskey. There are 12 junior high and senior high school students. I'd ask that the Assembly please just give them a warm welcome for the record.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to today to introduce three visitors to our Legislature. They are from Oakville, Ontario. They are Catherine Niles and her two sons, Steven and Philip. They are also visiting our Legislature and are here for some time. Their father and husband happens to be a very important worker with our caucus in the Official Opposition. He certainly helps us a lot, and I would like to invite the Niles family to please rise and receive a very warm welcome from the Alberta Legislature.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two visitors to Alberta. Laara Ong from Vancouver and Patrick Gallagher from Toronto are here while they are performing in local playwright Marty Chan's show, *Mom, Dad, I'm Living With a White Girl*. The show is on at the bus barns. They are with us until this Sunday. They are accompanied by the show's director, Ben Henderson, and I would ask all three of them to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

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

1:50

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct privilege today to introduce Reverend Dr. Charles Garbovitsky, a resident of Edmonton-Highlands, who is vehemently opposed to Bill 11. Dr. Garbovitsky is seated in the public gallery. I'll ask him to 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.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to assist Albertans who may be watching question period on the television, we wanted to assist them in getting more information on the government's rather weak case for privatizing health care. This government has in fact referenced eight studies on private hospitals in support of its private hospitals legislation. Interestingly, three of these studies are from the '70s, and one even uses data from the 1950s and '60s. This is no doubt because, as *The New England Journal of Medicine* reported in August, "for decades . . . no peer-reviewed study has found that for-profit hospitals are less expensive." My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier using data on private hospitals to support Bill 11 when he keeps telling Albertans that he is not interested in private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it is again misinformation and simply not true that the legislation refers to private hospitals. It does exactly the opposite. It says "no person shall operate a private hospital." And relative to any reference to private hospital legislation, that question is absolutely irrelevant.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the opposition and their Friends of Medicare and CUPE and all the other unions want Albertans to believe that private providers are evil and have no place in the publicly funded system. The leader of the Liberal opposition wants to force private providers to opt out of the publicly funded system. The AMA said it best when it called that policy a disaster for health care in Alberta and, indeed, across the country.

Mr. Speaker, private providers are and always have been an important part of the public health care system. How do these people over there think health care works? You know, it absolutely astounds me that the leader of the Liberal opposition, the former minister of health, has no idea how the health care system works. Perhaps if she asks me the next question, I'll explain it to her.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier didn't answer the question. These are his own studies that he referenced.

If Bill 11 has nothing to do with private hospitals, then why again

is this government's evidence for why they need this legislation based largely on private hospital data?

MR. KLEIN: It isn't. It's based on what is already taking place in the system. Virtually the whole system is based on the government through its health authorities paying private providers to provide medical services and supplies. There are now nearly 4,500 doctors in Alberta, most of them with for-profit professional corporations, that bill health care for services and supplies and charge fees that have overhead costs built into them.

Mr. Speaker, if all the private doctors were to opt out, who would be left? Well, CUPE would be left. Right. We could have Dr. Judy Darcy and Dr. Terry Mutton doing hip replacements. The Friends of Medicare would be left. We could have Dr. Christine Burdette doing heart surgeries. Of course, Dr. Harold Swanson, who's the only legitimate doctor, could join her, provided he was now willing to work for free. You know, he could do that. The federal government would be left. We could have Dr. Allan Rock and his assistant, Diane Marleau, to do brain surgery. That would be something.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that private providers are and always have been the backbone of the public health care system. The issue isn't private providers. The issue isn't who will pay. The only issue is: where will private providers be allowed to do procedures and under what conditions? That's what Bill 11 is all about.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual the Premier didn't answer the question.

The answer is one of two things: either they have no evidence, so they're using data from the '50s and '60s to support their case, or their actual intention is to bring in a private hospitals bill. Which is it: no evidence or private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's lots of evidence, and I'll go on. There are no private hospitals. Right now there are 588 chiropractors, 233 opticians, 278 optometrists, 1,414 dentists, 188 denturists, 38 podiatrists, 769 pharmacies, 375 ground ambulances, 14 air ambulances, 52 surgical facilities, 38 of which were commissioned by the leader of the Liberal opposition, many physiotherapy clinics, rehab clinics, child physiologists, walk-in clinics, medicentres: all privately owned and operated and paid to do work for the public health care system. Who would do the work if we banned them from the private sector in health? Who would do the work? The Liberals? Dr. MacBeth would do the work?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, one of the studies that's been referenced by this government is almost 30 years old and in fact, as I say, uses data from the 1950s. It reaches no conclusion about the effectiveness of private hospitals, let alone their suitability in Alberta in the 21st century. It's really a stretch even for this government to suggest that this study and others like it have any relevance to the debate on Bill 11. What it does show is a government scrambling for anything, no matter how remote or irrelevant, to back up their ill-conceived scheme. My questions again are to the Premier with his script. This study on private hospitals in the 1950s and '60s: what relevance does it have for Alberta in the 21st century?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do indeed have a script, and the script is in anticipation of the questions which are so predictable. Right.

You know, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to a private hospitals bill. There is no private hospitals bill. Until she alludes to the proper bill, the question is irrelevant, and I won't answer it.

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, getting back to the question, by using these outdated studies on private hospitals, is the Premier telling Albertans that there are no current studies or evidence that exists to back him up in his support for private hospitals through Bill 11?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, Bill 11 does not allude to private hospitals. As a matter of fact, Bill 11 talks about "No person shall operate a private hospital." The leader of the Liberal opposition refers and alludes to the bill as the private hospitals bill. Again, I would suggest that the question is irrelevant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier relying on outdated studies and outdated information when there are current studies done here in Canada and right here in Alberta that are far more relevant to this issue? Is it because their own studies have said that Bill 11 is wrong for Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is not wrong for Alberta. It sets in place very clear and very precise rules for the operation of surgical clinics, something, by the way, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition failed to do or ignored or didn't want to do when she was the minister of health.

Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Liberal opposition was minister of health, she made a claim in a speech, and I'm going to table copies of the speech. This was after she was the health minister and sort of between jobs, not that she has a real one now. "Until 1993 private sector initiatives were limited to specialized, niche markets where a profit could be made without subsidy." The fact is that there were 38 surgical facilities doing day surgeries for the public system and charging patient facility fees when she was the minister of health, and she did nothing about it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, just to help Albertans understand the lack of studies, interestingly the only current study tabled by this government to justify its private hospitals bill is the World Health Organization's report entitled *Making a Difference*. However, the government released only a portion of this report and in fact misrepresented the intent of this report. In fact, the report points to the Canadian public system as a model for other countries and does nothing, not a thing, to suggest that introducing private hospitals or clinics or surgical facilities or whatever they want to call them will improve the Canadian system. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the Premier only table one portion of the report, which misleads Albertans to understand what the report really says?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there was another portion of the report that alluded to the health system in Canada being fundamentally right and the right system, she's absolutely correct. The leader of the Liberal opposition is absolutely correct. That's why we have put in as our preamble absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. If they're opposed to that section of the bill, then stand up and say so.

Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to private hospitals and the private hospitals bill. There is no such bill on the table. There is a bill that alludes to surgical clinics. There are now 52 surgical facilities in Alberta, none of them charging patients facility fees, unlike the clinics that were operating when the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was minister of health. They were all charging facility fees. So far the public health system is still standing, despite facilities being able to do surgeries that require up to 12 hours.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is asking us to believe

that anything over 12 hours will destroy medicare. That's what she's saying: anything over 12 hours will destroy medicare. Mr. Speaker, will this hon. member stand up and say at what hour the destructive mechanism kicks in? Is it 13 hours or 14 hours or 15 or 23 or 27 hours? Will she stand up and say at what hour the so-called destructive, her suggestion, mechanism kicks in? Stand up and answer the question. She doesn't have the courage.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier will get plenty of chances to ask questions from the opposition benches after the next election.

Mr. Speaker, my question, going back to the studies, is: why does this Premier continue to misrepresent the World Health Organization 1999 report when in fact that report holds Canada out as a shining example of how to provide universal, single-tier, single-payer health care in an industrialized country? Why does this Premier want to privatize it and wreck it?

MR. KLEIN: We want to maintain it, and we want to protect it. That's why the bill is called the health protection act.

You know, again I go back to the report to which the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alludes. The 1999 World Health Organization report made the following conclusions about the role of the private sector in health. And, yes, I will accept that they also said that Canada has fundamentally the best system. That's why we have put in the preamble, Mr. Speaker, absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. If they're opposed to it, then stand up and say that they're opposed to at least the preamble of the bill. Are you opposed . . . [interjections]

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is yap, yap, yap. No substance. You know, a lot of mouth, no substance.

Mr. Speaker, I'll read it. This is from the World Health Organization report.

- Services may be offered by providers of all types.

Provided that health practices and health facilities meet certain quality standards and that they are subject to similar levels of managerial flexibility, their ownership status should not matter.

Now, if the report goes on to say that Canada has the best health care system in the world, then fine; I would find that very flattering. That's why we have put in the preamble, as I say, absolute adherence and compliance with the Canada Health Act, both the spirit and the intent of the law. If they're opposed to it, stand up and say so.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, instead of relying on outdated studies from the '50s and '60s and instead of misrepresenting what in fact is in the World Health Organization report, will this Premier commit to overseeing an independent study of our current system done here in Alberta by some of the excellent researchers that we have in our universities before he plunges headlong into his demise in the private hospital system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I just received the tablings. These are not reports. This is another blatant example of malicious misinformation. They table newspaper articles as a report; as a report. This is entitled a report: "Health care may vary by region - Klein." It's a newspaper article. Another one, they table it as a report. You want to talk about misleading. It's a newspaper article. This one here was tabled as a report. Again, it's another newspaper article. This is the closest to a report that they've come. It's actually the answer to a written question. This one here, another one: they tabled it as a report. How misleading. How deceptive. And there's more and more. How intellectually poor. How intellectually drained they

are to take newspaper articles and table them as reports. How intellectually poor they are.

2:10

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has claimed on many occasions that the government's scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals does not violate the Canada Health Act. A detailed legal opinion prepared by two senior lawyers who are experts in constitutional and regulatory law – and this report was just released today – concludes that the Premier is wrong. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier pressing ahead with legislation that two prominent constitutional lawyers have concluded violates the comprehensiveness, universality, and accessibility principles of the Canada Health Act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. leader of the third party that the preamble to the bill – you know, he is a very intelligent man. Read the preamble to the bill. The preamble, which sets the tone and lays out the framework for the bill, says absolutely without question that we will adhere to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify proceeding with legislation that purports to ban private, for-profit hospitals when two constitutional lawyers have concluded that this so-called prohibition is simply an attempt to mislead Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. leader is asking me to comment on a legal opinion, and you know, there are as many legal opinions as there are fish in the sea. So I won't comment.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Premier admit the obvious, that there is no public support or expert backing for legalizing private, for-profit hospitals, and withdraw Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member alludes to private, for-profit hospitals. There is nothing in Bill 11 that alludes in any way, shape, or form to the privatization of hospitals. As a matter of fact, section 1 says that "no person shall operate a private hospital." The question is irrelevant.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Support for Agriculture

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over two weeks ago the Prime Minister announced a farm aid package designed specifically to exclude Alberta producers. Today . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame. Shame.

MR. MARZ: That's right.

Today the Premier of Alberta and the minister of agriculture announced a onetime agricultural assistance package for Alberta farmers. This announcement contains no federal money even though agricultural safety net programs are traditionally funded by provinces and the federal government. Last week the members of the opposition across the way were recorded in this House as saying that Alberta farmers were out \$25 million as a result of the Prime Minister's announcements. My questions are to the Minister of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What did the province contribute today, and what does the minister expect the federal government to contribute to the program in the future?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement totaled \$145 million. We have taken the numbers – we still don't know how the federal government arrived at the numbers for Saskatchewan and Manitoba – and applied them to a tonnage basis, which seems to be the way they are going. If you extrapolate that over into Alberta and use the 60-40 formula, that would mean that the federal government would owe us about \$103 million.

Incidentally, we today sent them an invoice for the \$103 million. We're not going to charge any GST. If we get the money, we're going to send it directly out to farmers, and we won't charge any handling fee.

If you look at the amount of money that the province of Alberta put in today, we in fact have just about doubled what would be required under a 60-40 arrangement based on the other calculations. I think that the government of Alberta has stepped up to the plate big time and is going to try to make sure that Alberta farmers are treated equitably in Canada.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: could the minister tell me how farmers will receive the provincial assistance and the federal assistance, if and when it arrives?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, under the announcement today it will be distributed on a per acre basis, the bulk of the money, some \$121 million based on \$4.29 per acre. A very simple application form – as a matter of fact, it's just a one-pager. If you have a Wheat Board permit book, the one page out of the Wheat Board permit book will suffice to verify the acres. If you don't have a permit book, then in fact it will require the application form to be filled out and notarized.

If we are successful in getting the money from the feds, any amount, we in fact will be distributing it to the farmers immediately based on the application that they've submitted under this particular program.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: why has the government chosen to distribute aid by an acreage payment when it has been promoting targeted assistance for so long?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, there is a real cash flow crunch in the agricultural community, and it's very important that this money be distributed before seeding. So we're trying to get the money distributed as quickly as possible and without complicated forms. When you look at the ability to do that through an acreage payment, that's why we went this route.

Now, we have to remember that the farm income disaster program is a very targeted program. It targets the areas that are having a disaster. We've also got the hail and crop insurance program. Once again, it targets a disaster. So I think we've got a combination of the two. We've got targeted programs that will go toward disaster areas, and we now are coming out with a broad program that will get the money out fast. It will assist with the input costs that are continually going up. We have a great cost to get grain from the elevator to the port, so we'll be assisting in those kinds of costs that the farmer is bearing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Misrepresenting to Albertans outdated studies on private hospitals is all this government can find to justify the ramming of Bill 11 through the Legislature. My questions are to the Premier. Is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is based on a 1972 study that he tabled by Kenneth Clarkson about U.S. private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was too much noise, and I didn't hear all of the question. The only things I heard were "misleading" and "reports." The only people who are misleading anyone are the Liberals across the way by tabling in such a deceptive way newspaper clippings as reports. That is the only thing that is misleading.

2:20

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question will also be for the Premier. Is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is based on a 1972 study that he tabled by Kenneth Clarkson about U.S. private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: In 1972, Mr. Speaker, I was working for CFCN television. I don't recall tabling any such study, but if it's there, then send it over. Nineteen seventy-two. That was a long time ago. The only thing similar in 1972 and today is the price of oil. Right. That's about it.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, then why did you table it as support for your bill?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea.

MR. MacDONALD: Now, Mr. Speaker, that's leadership.

Can the Premier explain to Albertans why an American psychiatric hospital study that goes back to 1970 and was tabled in this Legislative Assembly has relevance in the discussion? Your government brought it forward right now in the discussion about Bill 11. Where does this study talk about surgical facilities and contracting out? Albertans want to know.

MR. KLEIN: I don't recall tabling any such report. Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some light on this particular situation. But going back to 1972. I mean, this is digging deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper. That just goes to show how intellectually bankrupt they really are.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recall a number of tablings. One was a set of studies that had undergone peer review – that is, review by physicians and scholars – and had been given approval for general publication in medical journals and so forth. Today they're firing quite a few blanks across the way, and you never know what they're saying or what they're alluding to.

Mr. Speaker, in a couple of those research studies – one of the things that is done in one that I remember particularly is that they do reference the beginning of studies, period, in terms of the operation of hospitals, and then they trace the different studies that have been done up until the present, where we've had a public health care system in this country. They emphasize in those research papers very clearly the current situation in North America. But the fact that they start out with a preface or an introduction which references studies in the area of health care is quite common to research papers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine-Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Education Funding

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks I've been discussing the issue of K to 12 education funding with both parents and teachers in my constituency. At the outset of the provincial budget there was a good deal of optimism when the announcement regarding a 9 percent increase in education funding was put on the table. That was somewhat moderated when further investigation indicated that there is, in fact, a 3 percent increase in the base funding grant. My question is to the Minister of Learning. With a 3 percent increase in the base funding grant, where is the other 6 percent going?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an absolutely excellent question. One of the issues that I have heard as I go out and talk to school boards as well is the total issue of being on core funding. Quite simply, I will outline to the hon. member where the dollars are, the amount of dollars, and what is being spent.

Mr. Speaker, there is a \$143 million increase in the basic instructional grant. I must point out that that includes a 3 percent increase on the base budget plus a 2 percent increase on enrollment. The budget is adjusted for enrollment. So if you're in a school jurisdiction, for example, that had a 5 percent increase, you would see a 5 percent plus a 3 percent increase.

There's also a \$17 million increase in special needs. This represents a 16 percent increase in that budget. There's also \$38 million in the Alberta initiative for school improvement. There's another \$31 million in support grants, which are the administration, the transportation, the operation and maintenance grants. The direct dollar amount to the classroom comes out to 8.8 percent, and those are actual dollars that are realized in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, what we then did is we separated out other aspects of the budget. When we say 8.8 percent, that is the direct amount into the classroom.

On top of that, there are also things like \$22 million for the teachers' pension plan. There's \$13 million for early childhood services. There's \$5 million for private schools. There's \$4 million for other types of programs, and, Mr. Speaker, there is \$11 million included in that for student health.

That's the long answer. The short answer to the hon. member is that there's actually a 9.5 percent increase of which 8.8 percent goes directly into the classroom.

MR. RENNER: My supplemental question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Given that wages and other related costs are increasing at or perhaps more than 3 percent, how will the minister ensure that this 8.8 percent that he talks about actually gets to the classroom and addresses the issue of increasing class sizes?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are two ways this can occur. First of all, the Alberta initiative for school improvement: we anticipate that a lot of the \$66 million that will be put into it over the next two fiscal years or one school calendar year will be used to address class size.

Mr. Speaker, the school boards also have room in their 3 percent, plus their enrollment growth. Again, I must emphasize that that can be in the area of 4 to 5 percent. The school boards have the flexibility to use those moneys to address class size.

MR. RENNER: My final question to the same minister: given that the budget also discusses addressing the needs of special-needs students, can the minister outline exactly how those needs will be addressed?

DR. OBERG: Sure, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. Over the last six or seven months there have been numerous examples of the importance that this government places on special-needs education. In the last budget, as I already mentioned, there is a 16 percent increase. You can put on top of that a \$2 million increase that was announced past the budget. What this \$2 million does is allow school boards that receive children with special needs to receive money. As well, the school that had transferred the student can keep their money. The reason behind this is that the school that has transferred the student has put in place the program and therefore has contracted that out and must continue to supply that service.

Mr. Speaker, I would just go back to what has happened over the past year. Probably the most significant thing to the hon. member was the lifting of the special-needs cap. Again, we are funding today on the actual number of students that are there. This is a huge step forward. But I must stress with special needs that it's up somewhere in the 16 to 17 percent area.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is expecting Albertans to go down the Bill 11 private health care road based on out-of-date studies and the misrepresentation of other studies. All the current, pertinent data clearly shows that Bill 11 simply will not work. To the Premier: is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is supported by an 1982 study that his government tabled about private U.S. nuclear medicine hospitals? What does this have to do with the 21st century in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the study to which the hon. member alludes is one of literally dozens of studies that have been tabled in this Legislature on the question. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is more familiar with the specifics of that study. Perhaps he is; perhaps he's not. I'll have him respond anyway.

2:30

MR. JONSON: There seems to be in the hon. member's question a reference to nuclear medicine not being relevant to today's overall health care situation, but I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that nuclear medicine is very much part of the forward-thinking and evidence-based health care that's being provided.

The tabling that is probably being referred to – I would just like to draw the attention of hon. members to a 1997 study that was tabled in this Assembly: *Should We Worry About Hospitals' High Administrative Costs?* by Stuart H. Altman, with his doctorate, and David Shactman. It's in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which is a highly reputable publication that I'm sure would not publish anything that was not accurate, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, we tabled with the Assembly an article from the *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization*, with Jerilyn Coles and William Hesterly being the authors. This was in 1998, not too long ago, Mr. Speaker.

We also tabled from the *Journal of Productivity Analysis*, authors Gary Ferrier and Vivian Valdmanis: this was from 1996. They determined that in a rural setting public hospitals were inefficient compared to private hospitals. That was the basis for their research.

I could work my way down the line, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, if he is relying on an '82 study, let me try this one. My second question: is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is based on a 1976 study by Cotton Lindsay on

administration in U.S. private hospitals? I thought this wasn't about private hospitals.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there have been dozens and dozens of studies tabled in this Legislature on the issue of health care and health care delivery. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is much more familiar than I am with these studies. He has them all in hand.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's go to 1976, a good year. Lindsay, the author of this particular journal article, again as I've said, from a credible medical publication, says that public hospitals keep patients longer and skimp on activities such as bedside manner and cleaning floors. That is still as relevant today as it was then, and this is the basis for this research.

MR. WICKMAN: My last question, Mr. Speaker: why does the Premier choose to ignore the conclusion of one of the studies his government tabled called *Rural Hospital Performance and Its Correlates*, which shows that for-profit medicine will focus on urban areas and create further disadvantages for rural areas?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I repeat that there have been dozens and dozens of studies tabled in this Legislature by both sides of the Assembly. This all adds to the public debate on Bill 11, and that's what we encourage. For a change I actually commend the Liberal Party for bringing up these studies, because they all contribute to the debate. I think that once the bill comes up for second reading those studies that have been tabled by the government, by the way, will be quite germane to the debate that will ensue.

Relative to the specific study, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated previously, these are very credible pieces of research or studies that have been done in this area. They are well worth reading and well worth considering as part of this debate. They also acknowledge in the reports certain downsides to private provision as well as some of the positives. I think that's the mark of credible writing, credible publications, quite different from newspaper articles and blank-page reports, which seem to be the vehicle for the Liberals entering this debate.

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

Enhanced Health Services

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of publicity about charges for enhanced goods and services, both in public hospitals and in private clinics. Some of my constituents have expressed their concern to me about the fact that Albertans may be paying unfair prices for enhanced products. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What action is government going to take to address this matter?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have reviewed and been aware for some time that there is a concern about the variability in terms of the provision of enhanced goods and services and also the pricing thereof. These of course are – and I would like to emphasize this; it's very important – devices or services that are not essential. They are not medically required. They are not covered by the Canada Health Act with respect to our system. Of course, our system covers all those insured services for the public of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we have recently issued a directive to the regional health authorities of this province whereby we will work with them

towards establishing, first of all, a uniform criteria for what constitutes enhanced goods and services. Secondly, we will establish standard pricing for those additions which a patient, if properly informed and allowed to make the choice properly, may want to utilize. We will approach it that way so that it is fair across the province for everyone and that patients and individuals will have the proper information.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is again to the minister of health. Why would regional health authorities be allowed to charge 12 percent on top of the cost of enhanced goods and services?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it has to be recognized that in terms of, first of all, doing the accounting and administering these transactions, should people want to avail themselves of these enhanced goods and services, will cost money. Secondly, they have to factor in such things as shipping and handling costs. They, in some cases, will have to make provision for the storage of these facilities, not just the space, but often refrigeration and various other backup facilities have to be available. So in looking at a reasonable amount to have as an administrative charge, we chose 12 percent. It seemed to be agreed upon as being a reasonable rate.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. What action will the minister take to ensure that these limits apply to surgical facilities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we can initiate this through a policy and directive to regional health authorities, and we have done so. Regional health authorities come under current legislation. One of the provisions in the overall governing of regional health authorities is that the minister of health has the power to approve or not approve their business plans and everything in them.

Mr. Speaker, we would want to look at extending this particular approach, this particular provision to any private surgical service or other service that might be contracted to a regional health authority. To do so in an effective manner, we need to have the legislation which is before the Assembly.

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

Confidentiality of Medical Records

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only does this government ignore or misinterpret studies; it also ignores experience. It was in 1998 that we found that records of mental health patients had been left untended, discovered in the demolition of the General hospital. In 1999 it was personal health records blowing around a south Calgary neighbourhood. Now we have confidential laboratory reports from the Calgary Laboratory Services which had been sent by fax to wrong numbers. It turns out that this had been happening for at least a month. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why has this minister and his government carved out and given special protection so that private hospitals are not going to have to respect and protect the privacy of Alberta patients?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recall a very important piece of legislation that was before this Legislature dealing with the protection of health information. The hon. member across the way, although I think he contributed very positively to the development of the legislation, then seemed to turn completely around and oppose pretty well everything in it. We are currently working to implement Bill 40, and this I think is an important overarching matter. We are

working towards the proper regulations in consultation with the stakeholders. So that will be an overall improvement that we are planning to make to the system.

I think we have a good record in this province in terms of protecting the confidentiality of health information. We have living in this province around 3 million people, Mr. Speaker. There will be human errors made. The electronic network poses challenges to everybody working in the health care system, but to make the mistake – and I agree it's a serious mistake, but nevertheless it can be made by an individual – to dial up the wrong fax number, is something that will happen in modern life.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that these assurances sound remarkably like the assurances we got in 1998 and after the incident in 1999, I want to ask this minister: what disciplinary action is going to be taken with respect to the improper abuse of privacy of Calgaryans in terms of their lab reports being sent to unauthorized persons?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on the three occasions which the member has referred to in the Calgary regional health authority over the last number of years the Calgary regional health authority has followed up and investigated the situation and taken corrective action where it was possible. The case of the General hospital, of course, was a very unique situation. I'm sure they will do the same thing if the statements of the individual across the way are correct. Normally he is very honourable in these matters, but today it's really a little bit hard to believe that they are that way across the way. Anyway, it will be followed up and disciplinary action taken if deemed to be fair in the circumstances.

MR. DICKSON: My final question, Mr. Speaker, would be this: given that this government rejected the Canadian Medical Association privacy code as a model for the health information law, is this minister prepared to review the law, since it's not yet been proclaimed, and make the changes required to adequately protect the privacy of patients in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Bill 40 contains some of the most comprehensive and protective legislation in any province in this country.

The other thing. You know, Mr. Speaker, the question is important to the individual case, but the only way that you can absolutely, one hundred percent protect against that kind of situation occurring is to ban people from using fax machines, and I don't think that's something that even the Liberals are backward enough to advocate.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of the hon. members to participate. In the interim would you all join me in wishing the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake a happy birthday?

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Eid Al-Adha

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, the 16th day of March, the day after tomorrow, approximately 2 billion Muslims from around the world will be celebrating a very important event in the Islamic calendar and the Islamic religion. That event is Eid Al-Adha, or the celebration of sacrifice. The Eid Al-Adha festival commemorates God's test of the prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail for God, a story common to both the Old Testament and the Holy Koran.

Mr. Speaker, during this time every year about 3.5 million Muslims from every corner of the globe visit the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia to perform the pilgrimage, or hajj. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. It also symbolizes on a larger scale the unity of all humanity. Millions of pilgrims all dressed in a similar way and completing the same rituals discard the division of race, wealth, and social status and instead unite in brotherhood and sisterhood in service to one God. It is incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman to perform the hajj at least once in their lifetime, if and when they are able to do so.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Assembly and in particular my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall I would like to express my sincere best wishes and congratulations to the Canadian Muslim community and in particular to the 75,000 Muslims who make Alberta their home. I would like to say to all of them, to each and every one of them, Eid Mubarak.

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

Gasoline Tax

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks about tax cuts, but when it comes down to taking the load off Albertans, they prefer to wait for the next election. Albertans own the oil and gas underneath this province, yet when the world price goes up, the people pay more for their own gasoline at the pump and their own natural gas at home. What does this government do about it? Absolutely nothing. Oh, they do something. They take the big fat royalty cheques to the Treasury just to buy votes for the next election.

Last week I suggested a painless method of giving back some taxpayers' money to the taxpayers. I suggested that after each quarter they set a fuel rate for the next quarter. I suggested that the tax rate be reduced by 1 cent for every dollar that the world price went above \$19 a barrel. Painless. Absolutely right; it's painless. Because the Treasury, even with that tax break, a temporary tax break, I might add, goes up. Every time I mention the tax break, this government goes on and on and on about the federal government, which they do absolutely nothing about. Or they say that a tax reduction is too complicated. Now, Mr. Speaker, how complicated is it to reduce the tax by 1 cent for every dollar? Not very tough.

I say to the Premier: even though it's not an election year, do the right thing and give taxpayers in this province a break. Reduce that tax. And, Mr. Premier, jump to the pump on this one.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Arctic Winter Games

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a volunteer member of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation I'm delighted to rise today to bring recognition to the 232 Team Alberta North athletes who participated in the 16th Arctic Winter Games from March 5 to 11. Since 1970 the Arctic Winter Games have provided a cultural and athletic experience for athletes and cultural delegates north of the 55th parallel. The games, which promote competitive opportunities for young athletes, attract participants from Alaska, Greenland, northern Quebec, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Russia, and Yukon Territory.

The Arctic Winter Games have a strong cultural and athletic component. From incorporating artistic competitions to traditional Arctic sports of the Inuit, the entire culture of the games provides participants with a uniquely northern experience. The games also

foster friendships among the participants while allowing them to develop their personal and athletic skills.

2:50

Held in Whitehorse, Yukon, our own Team Alberta North displayed exceptional gold ulu performances in hockey, volleyball, and curling from the men's and women's teams, while the women's indoor soccer team scored silver. Finishing fourth overall, Team Alberta North brought home a total of 86 ulus, including 37 gold, 25 silver, and 24 bronze, a near sweep of team sports and a strong performance in individual sports.

The ulu, Mr. Speaker, is a symbol of athletic achievement at the Arctic Winter Games and is styled after the traditional Inuit knife used as an all-purpose tool in the Arctic for centuries. The Arctic Winter Games, also known as the Friendly Games, continue under the mission of athletic competition, cultural exhibition, and social interchange.

The next Winter Games will be held in Nuuk, Greenland, and Iqaluit, Nunavut, in 2002, and we'll look forward to seeing our athletes and cultural delegates displaying their talents and representing Alberta's pride.

Please join me in recognizing our fine athletes who took part in the 16th Arctic Winter Games.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Privilege Tabling Documents

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on what I presume to be a point of order but could possibly be a point of privilege, and I would ask your direction on that matter. I'm rising under Standing Order 2, which provides that the Speaker may make rulings in those areas that are unprovided for, and under Standing Order 15(1), the privilege sections of the Standing Orders.

In short, Mr. Speaker, I think the House witnessed today one of the most intellectually dishonest exercises that I've seen in a long time. Members of the opposition stood in their places and purported to table reports, described them as reports, insinuated to the House and to members of the public who might have been watching through the provisions of television that they had reports when in fact what they had were essentially blank pages with one line on it, report heading, and one line on it, some excerpt from a newspaper article, and in most cases a newspaper article attached to that page. The members one after the other got up in an intellectually dishonest manner, portrayed to this House and to members of the public through this House and through the televised access that members of the public have to this house that they actually had reports which purported to say what they described to the House.

Mr. Speaker, I've looked briefly and quickly through the rules.

MRS. SOETAERT: Shame on you.

MR. HANCOCK: No. Shame on you, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Shame on you.

The rules relating to tablings and the practice of the House have been very broad. *Beauchesne* 347, at page 107, under tabling of documents indicates that with respect to the practice in the federal House tablings can be done in two different ways and talks about government members, members of Executive Council essentially, tabling government documents. We've had a much broader practice in this House with respect to tablings, and in fact the process of

tabling, in my humble submission, has been stretched and abused to an extreme.

However, Mr. Speaker, it has never been stretched and abused in the manner that it was stretched and abused today, where members get up and say, "I'm tabling a dog," and then they table a cat, or perhaps "I'm tabling a cat," and then they table a dog. The items that were tabled by various members of the opposition this afternoon were in no way, shape, or form reports. They could not be considered reports. They were not reports other than newspaper reports. Newspaper reports. But did they say they were newspaper reports? No, they did not.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest it could go almost to a breach of privilege of members of the House in terms of that type of misrepresentation, which brings all members of the House into disrepute and really raises questions, I would suggest in both this House and in the public, as to whether we are really in an honourable place.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for your direction as to how we might proceed properly with this type of a point of order, because as I've said, the rules are not directly on point. The process of tabling documents in this House I believe started, without having done a great deal of research in the last half hour, from the concept that documents of public importance were to be laid before the House and become official records of the House. That was the origin, as I understand it, of the process of tabling. Today we've seen the most ultimate abuse of that privilege of members of this House that we've ever seen.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, strip away the hyperbole – and we heard lots of that – and this is what we've got. The Government House Leader says that he thinks this may be a question of privilege because of a number of documents that were tabled today.

Let me just deal with the privilege thing first, because I think it has little merit. Privilege is one of the most important issues that can be raised in this Assembly. We have occasion to do this maybe three or four times in the course of a session. It typically revolves around a member or the Assembly being impeded – I'm paraphrasing the authorities, Mr. Speaker, because I don't think it warrants more – from being able to speak on issues, to speak to questions. That's not at issue here. In fact, one can argue that if we were to be deprived of the chance to be able to table documents that are relevant to Albertans on relevant issues, that may invite a question of privilege.

Now, the member talks about authority. He talks about general authority, but I look right at Standing Order 37, Mr. Speaker. That's the one that I understand deals with tablings in this Assembly. First, 37(1) appears to deal with what we'd call statutory tablings, that are defined by statute and there's a statutory requirement to file them. I look at sub (3), which says:

Documents presented voluntarily to the Assembly for placement in the records of the Assembly and the Legislature Library may be tabled in quintuplicate by a member.

Now, I don't see anything in the Standing Orders that says that you can only table this and you can't table that. You have given direction, sir. You've talked about not tabling documents that have already been tabled, and you've offered many points of commentary in terms of what ought to be said when documents are tabled, usually to a point of encouraging brevity. We talked about this on April 15, 1999, in *Hansard*, pages 1039 and 1048. You addressed tabling draft amendments on April 29, 1998, page 1813 in *Hansard*. You've talked about members should police themselves to avoid duplicate tablings of copies of the same document, November 25, '98. Page 2089 said that *Hansard* excerpts shouldn't be routinely tabled. You've addressed those, but there is nothing that defines a report anywhere in the Standing Orders.

I can't give you a specific example, but I've sat here and watched many times the Provincial Treasurer, other members of the Executive Council, and the Premier table things that I could quibble about, whether it adds anything to the debate, whether it's useful information. But a report, in my respectful submission, until a Standing Order says something different, is whatever a member considers to be a report. There's no statutory definition that binds this Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: How about the truth? You guys wouldn't know that.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, this may be a stimulating debate if we have people speak from the floor as well as from their seats.

My observation is this. Firstly, it's nonsense to speak of this as a question of privilege. In terms of a point of order, the one relevant Standing Order in no way precludes what members did this afternoon. As you always enjoin us, what's good for one side must be good for the other, and that calls into question a host of tablings that I wasn't very happy with and I didn't approve of, for whatever that's worth, when I saw them come in. But I didn't take the time at the time, because I respect the right of each member in this Assembly to table the document that he or she thinks is appropriate.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the final comment I would make is this. I have not viewed every document that was tabled this afternoon, but I have been advised by my colleagues that the documents tabled this afternoon in fact reflect statements made at different times by members of Executive Council or others on issues that are relevant to matters before this Assembly and issues relevant to Albertans.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. Clearly, at most a point of order, and I think not a sustainable one at that, and clearly not a question of privilege. I look forward to the vigorous arguments that hopefully we're going to hear from the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we were to accept the argument of the Opposition House Leader, then we should only really be concerned with those breaches of privilege which may be related to impeding the ability of a member of this Legislature to discharge his or her duties. We have to respect the rights of individual members, but *Beauchesne* makes it also very clear that we have to respect the privileges of this House.

I'm going to refer you to section 33 of *Beauchesne* and quote briefly from it. "The most fundamental privilege of the House as a whole is to establish rules of procedure for itself and to enforce them." That, I think, is the critical line in that particular section. It's clear. The House has its own privilege to maintain, and by maintaining that privilege, it maintains its respect and its dignity.

With respect to what has happened today, I would argue that respect and dignity has been undermined. It's been undermined because members of the opposition used the very rules for their own benefit entirely and in an abusive way and in a misleading way. What has happened, Mr. Speaker, is that I feel this House has an obligation to raise this issue, which has been done, and to suggest to the opposition members that their abuse of the very rules which are in place to protect all members of this House is unacceptable, and we shouldn't be accepting that. So I would argue very strongly that there has been a breach of the privileges of this House, and I would rely on section 33 of *Beauchesne*.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't respond to the assertion that privilege is at issue here, because quite frankly I think the government in their overreaction is grasping at straws.

But what I will respond to are the statements made by the Government House Leader. By incorporation, when he said the opposition and those members opposite, he referred to myself, that I did something that would deliberately mislead this House. He was also uttering the phrase – I'm not sure whether *Hansard* picked it up – intellectual dishonesty.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk for a minute about intellectual dishonesty in this point of order. What I tabled for this Assembly is a document entitled Report, subtitled "Klein praises block funding." It's a two-sentence report. Attached to it is the source document.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing that I could find that would prohibit me from doing this, and there is nothing that would suggest that I have deliberately or unintentionally misled this House. I would expect at some point in this ruling that that Government House Leader will stand and withdraw those remarks, because if you want to talk about intellectual dishonesty, that sums it up.

I will reference *Beauchesne* 495, under the title of Documents Cited, where it reads in part:

- (2) It has been admitted that a document which has been cited ought to be laid upon the Table of the House.

Mr. Speaker, 495 goes on to say:

- (5) To be cited, a document must be quoted or specifically used to influence debate. The admission that a document exists or the reading of the salutation or address of a letter does not constitute citing.

Mr. Speaker, the government recently issued a press release criticizing calculations having to do with the Canada health and social transfer. It is the government that continually goes down this path. It seems that they like to dish it out, but they can't take it. When they introduce matters into debate that are misleading, they do not like to have their own words fed back to them. I guess they find that to be cruel gruel, indeed.

So I would say that not only is there no point of privilege, there is no point of order. Furthermore, I would ask that you remind the Government House Leader of his obligation to pay attention to the fullness of the rules of this House, including debate, and the role of each and every private member and caution him about his words when he would suggest that a member of this opposition is doing anything to purposely mislead this Assembly when it seems, Mr. Speaker, that that was his intent in raising this erroneous point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, caution was expressed by the chair several weeks ago when he sent a letter to all hon. members dealing with this whole subject matter of tabling returns and reports and on various occasions has also exercised an opportunity to provide some thoughts with respect to this whole matter.

Our Standing Orders – and I want to repeat them again, because I think they are very important. Standing Order 37(1):

- Any return, report or other paper required to be laid before the Assembly in accordance with an Act or with any resolution or Standing Order of the Assembly shall be tabled in quintuplicate, one copy of which shall be placed in the records of the Assembly and two in the Legislature Library, one to the Official Opposition, and one to *Hansard*.

Now, that deals with "in accordance with an Act or with any resolution or Standing Order of the Assembly."

Standing Order 37(2) says:

Responses to written questions and returns ordered by the Assembly shall be tabled in duplicate and the respondent shall also give one copy each to the member who asked the question or moved the motion for a return, the Government House Leader, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of any other party or group in opposition.

And 37(3):

Documents presented voluntarily to the Assembly for placement in the records of the Assembly and the Legislature Library may be tabled in quintuplicate by a member.

Of course, one can take the broadest interpretation possible with respect to (3), and it seems that some members are in fact taking the broadest interpretation possible with respect to this matter. This allows private members in this parliament to table and participate in tablings, which is really quite unique and quite distinct and quite different than the procedure found in other places and other parliaments.

I would like to refer hon. members to a very interesting book that has just been published in the last weeks called the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, probably the most definitive book that the chair has had an opportunity to run across, recently published by the hon. Monsieur Parent, who is the current Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, and edited by the Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons, who has been the Clerk in the Canadian House of Commons for a number of years.

I would like to read the section called Tabling of Documents by Private Members, page 373 of the *Canadian House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

There has been a long-standing practice in the House that private Members may not table documents, official or otherwise, even with the unanimous consent of the House. Unlike Ministers who must table documents required by statute or in respect to their administrative responsibilities, the Standing Orders contain no provisions for private Members to table documents. Another reason against the tabling of documents by private Members relates to the availability of the document in both official languages as required by the rules. However, since the 1980s, Members have been allowed on occasion to table documents with the unanimous consent of the House; the documents have typically been tabled in only one language.

There are many, many citations where this matter has been dealt with, in the *Journals*, including reviews by Speaker Lamoureux, who I believe is probably viewed as one of the most distinguished Speakers in all of the Commonwealth.

3:10

I repeat what I said at the beginning. In this Chamber we have this very unique provision that allows private members to table, but there always was an intent with respect to what that tabling meant. Of course, time comes and time goes. New members come and other members leave, and somehow hon. members don't recall the reasons why there are certain provisions in our Assembly. I daresay and must reiterate that in terms of the last major review of Standing Orders that we had in this House, which was 1992 and 1993, this person was involved very directly in it. There was always an intent and understanding of what our Standing Orders meant.

I really believe that great liberties have been taken in this Assembly during this parliament with respect to some of these items. This is not a matter that can be dealt with unless our Standing Orders are changed and modified. Undoubtedly, there will be an opportunity in the future to review all of the Standing Orders, and undoubtedly when the review is done by the various people who are involved in the review of the Standing Orders, those individuals will want to consult with other parliaments not only in this country but throughout the Commonwealth in respect to some of these matters. I think we have a special privilege in Alberta with respect to tablings, a

very, very special privilege, that hon. members, private members, should consider to be rather unique, and it should be dealt with the highest degree of integrity at all times.

It is not for the chair to respond to the Government House Leader to advise him whether or not it should be a point of privilege or a point of order. The chair will view this as a major point of clarification and give all members an opportunity to discuss this. Hon. members must discipline themselves with respect to these matters and must have the highest degree of integrity with respect to all of this.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Audio of Proceedings on Assembly Web Site

THE SPEAKER: Before concluding this matter, I'd just like to advise all members, as well, that we have started testing today, and the tests seem to have been working quite well for the last two hours. The proceedings of this particular Assembly are now available over the Internet broadcast. It will be our intent to have all matters of this Assembly available over the Internet broadcast beginning at 1:30 p.m. on a daily basis and going through to the very conclusion, to the end of a late evening. It can be accessed on the Legislative Assembly of Alberta web site.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 202 Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I'm presenting my final arguments on Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act. I begin by posing a very simple question: is the institution of marriage worth defending? It is a very simple question, but it is at the heart of the bill before us.

Some of you suppose that this was an easy bill for me to bring forward because I have been an outspoken advocate for the natural family, yet many of my friends and people I know and have worked with over the years have not had a happy experience with marriage. Others have made choices to remain single. In some of the those marriages it would impossible to suggest that the marriage should be preserved. So why, Mr. Speaker, would I want to possibly offend any of these friends and acquaintances by defending marriage? Why would I risk being categorized as mean-spirited or judgmental or any of the other labels that have been fixed to those who take a principled stance on matters of social consequence?

The pressure to conform, to be silent, to resist issues of consequence is enormous, but when I sit back and think through all of the angles, all of the different rationales, all of the research, the history and the traditions, I cannot be drawn to any other conclusion except to affirm that the institution of marriage is worth defending. Today you will also have to answer that question, or perhaps tomorrow, when you vote at third reading.

Does the fact that many marriages are problematic and many fail mean that we should shelve the institution which has proven to be the best model for the advancement of society? At second reading I made the case based on social science research that marriage has a tremendous amount of value. As governments we spend great amounts of energy dedicated to making divorce better. We create task forces and legislation that deal with issues around maintenance

enforcement and access issues. It is my contention that we need to spend some energy on how to make marriage better.

Mr. Speaker, I'm turning now to the notwithstanding clause. At committee we had a point of order that was raised. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo argued very well that there were two elements to this bill. He referenced the fact that there was a substantive element, which was the definition of marriage, and a procedural one. I argued the opposite, but the chairman ruled in his favour. So using that argument, I would present before them today, those who voted or spoke against the notwithstanding clause – and I understand their reluctance to use the notwithstanding clause, but it is a procedural mechanism that, I argue, is available to governments in order to exercise their legislative authority with respect to matters of urgent importance. Surely where the substantive matter, to use their argument, is in fact the definition of marriage, I would expect at third reading that they would overlook their discomfort with the procedural element and protect the substantive part, which is in fact the definition of marriage. I present them with that challenge.

Again, going back to the very simple question before us, the question that has to be asked when voting at third reading: is the institution of marriage worth defending?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the institution of marriage is absolutely worth protecting. That's why we want to ensure that mediation is freely available to couples having difficulty. That's why we want to make sure that young people in this province are provided with information and access to information to be able to understand the amazing asset that the institution of marriage is.

What our friend from Red Deer-South sort of glosses over as a "procedural mechanism" is, once again, the most powerful kind of tool you could ever imagine. This is the thing that suspends the rights of Canadians. It suspends the Charter, which is in many respects the only bulwark between an individual citizen and the power of the state.

You know, I was never very comfortable with section 33 of the Charter. I have trouble imagining when I'd countenance readily the use of that, but to suggest that we use it in a prophylactic way, which is the part of this Bill 202, smacks of exactly what we went through with Bill 26 – was it two years ago? – when the government decided to suspend the rights of sexual sterilization victims. The comment from the then Minister of Justice – maybe he didn't use the words – was something like: this is a procedural mechanism. When the Premier later tried to defend it, before he did his 180-degree reversal, the Premier said: well, this is just one of those procedural things. Well, this is not just . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: A point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I hate to raise the whole question of privilege again, but the hon. member knows I did not make any such statement.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you leaving now?

MR. HAVELOCK: I'll be back.

THE SPEAKER: Hold on, hon. member.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm holding.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: Would you kindly return, please?

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would you kindly help the chair? You said you were rising on a point of privilege. Now, again, rising on a point of privilege will be taken very, very seriously in this Chamber and will offer you the opportunity to make your argument with respect to this privilege matter.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I simply wanted to point out the fact that I made no such statement. Perhaps it wasn't a point of privilege, and I withdraw it as a point of privilege.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: I was going to carry on with my debate at third reading, Mr. Speaker, and make this point. I would have hoped that we would have learned from the experience with attempting to beat up on sexual sterilization victims that Albertans don't take the use of section 33 readily. Albertans don't countenance readily the use of section 33 to suspend the rights, and to do it in advance of any kind of a Charter challenge is the most dangerous thing of all.

I think I made it as clear as I could in second reading and committee that I support marriage. I've been married 22 years. It's a wonderful institution. I recommend it to anybody, and I'd be happy to do what I can as an elected person to support the notion of marriage, but to see a piece of legislation in this province get to third reading that has a section 5 in it that contemplates the use of section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms just on the off chance that somewhere down the road some superior court is going to rule that marriage means something other than the definition set out in section 4 is completely inappropriate. It's a dangerous, dangerous course, and I can't overlook that. I can't ignore that. I have to vote against this bill because I feel so strongly against the use of the notwithstanding clause.

I say again that I respect the sincerity of the sponsor of the bill. He and I have obviously just very different views on when and how section 33 should be used. We have very different views of how significant the notwithstanding clause is, although I agree on the importance of marriage.

I make the observation one more time, Mr. Speaker, that we had provided this government with a way of protecting the word spouse, protecting the word marriage. We had come up with a way of Charter-proofing Alberta legislation, and we put that forward in good faith. We kicked it around and road tested it on Bill 12, and we brought it back when we talked about the Insurance Amendment Act. I'm not sure what else we can do. The government chose not to accept that offering, and what's curious is that the government never came up with a better alternative. My colleagues and I, I think, have been looking forward to seeing what the government's answer is to make our legislation Charter-proof without denying equal treatment for every man and woman in this province.

This bill just doesn't worry about equal treatment. It sort of glosses over that. It worries about doing one part, which is protecting the word marriage, protecting the word spouse indirectly. It doesn't define spouse. It attempts to do that, and the bill in effect says — and I hope I'm not being unfair to the Member for Red Deer-South. The people who have spoken in favour of it seem to be throwing up their hands and saying: well, we're just not very concerned about the equality issue; that just isn't sort of a big issue. That's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, because we always have to be concerned about equality.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that I hoped we would be able to do in this

Assembly in 1999 was to recognize that if two adult Albertans should choose to enter into a simple contract, certain rights and obligations and so on would accrue to that relationship, a mutually supportive, long-term relationship. We had hoped that this Legislature would find a way to accommodate that and respect the will of those two adult Albertans.

The proposal we put forward is not unique. If you look at Scandinavian countries, they found a way, without having to redefine marriage, to respect the word marriage and respect the importance that people attach to it. In Norway, I think in Sweden, I think in Denmark, and in a number of other nations they've also addressed the other part, the part that's missing from this bill. They managed to address that business of equality and fairness.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that as the debate has gone on, it's been instructive. As strongly as I feel against the use of the notwithstanding clause, it would be very unfair to be dismissive of the genuineness and the sincerity of the people who have spoken on both sides of the debate. Frankly, I've been very impressed that the debate has managed to avoid rancour and name-calling. I think that for the most part it has been a respectful discussion of different points of view.

What I've been struck with is how resonant the theme is about respecting the institution of marriage. I went back through all of the *Hansard* debate, and I'm not sure I found anybody who took a view that it's not important to protect marriage so that it means a man and a woman. I'm not sure anybody said that. Maybe there are others with keener eyes than this member who observed that or heard that, but I didn't.

As I reflect on the debate that took place, maybe this is what should happen on a Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon, where people unfettered by party discipline should be able to speak in a way that they can be directly accountable to their constituents. None of us can use the excuse of party discipline in terms of how we vote on a bill like this. Each of us has to be able to defend how we vote as well as how we speak and what we say to this particular bill.

At the end of the day let us recognize that Bill 202 is a dangerous, dangerous, dangerous piece of legislation. It's scary that it's so close to becoming something that's passed by this Legislative Assembly. Can we not say at third reading, as we reflect back on the debate, that we require the sponsor of the bill to address the equality issue? It's not enough just to protect the word marriage. Is there not sort of a threshold test that has to be met on every piece of legislation where we talk about being fair to every man and woman in this province? This bill is demonstrably not fair, and I think that's a glaring defect. I think it's a huge gap in the bill. Maybe there are others who see that somehow we've addressed the equality. I can't find it in Bill 202. It doesn't pass the threshold test that I'd suggest has to be met.

Mr. Speaker, the other concern I'd have with the bill is that there may be members who go away thinking, if this becomes law, that we've sort of addressed the issue of marriage, that we don't have to do anything . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocation for this matter today has now left us.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

School Uniforms

503. Mrs. Forsyth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a pilot project to examine the feasibility of a school uniform policy in Alberta schools as current research gathered from other jurisdictions shows a correlation between

the requirement to wear school uniforms and a decrease in school violence.

[Debate adjourned March 7: Ms Olsen speaking]

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

MR. HERARD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand and speak this afternoon to Motion 503, which encourages pilot projects on school uniforms. A pilot project for school uniforms in Alberta, as my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek proposes, is worth exploring.

Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting that my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has been overwhelmed by the public support that has arisen since she introduced this motion. She has concerned parents calling from across Alberta and in fact from across Canada seeking more information on uniforms and asking her how they can organize to get uniforms implemented in their children's schools. In fact, my colleague has had trouble just trying to keep up with all the public interest in this idea.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hundreds of calls.

MR. HERARD: Yes, hundreds and hundreds of calls.

Mr. Speaker, this shows the grassroots support that is out there for this idea, and we in this Legislature should perhaps pay close attention to this in making our decision on this motion.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Hon. colleagues, this is a motion, not a bill. The information and debate brought forward by my colleague in sponsoring Motion 503 and the results that may emerge from running a school uniform pilot project may well change the popular view of school uniform policies. Motion 503 proposes the adoption of school uniforms in a sensible manner by proposing a small-scale pilot project to assess the feasibility of such a policy for Alberta students before looking at adopting school uniforms across the province. Madam Speaker, motions seek to encourage action, not to mandate it.

In Alberta we have a few public schools with uniform policies, schools already mentioned in this debate, like the Nellie McClung school in Edmonton and the Sacred Heart elementary school in Calgary. Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that in one breath the opposition denounces the voluntary pilot project my colleague is proposing yet in the next breath say how good these schools with uniform policies are. I understand that constituents in the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert have been calling and asking for information on this concept.

My hon. colleague is proposing an initiative at the community level with consultation from parents, teachers, and students. She's trying to get a few schools to try this out and see if the successful outcomes that the members for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and Calgary-Buffalo mentioned occurring at the Sacred Heart school can be duplicated elsewhere. That's what a voluntary project is.

In fact, Madam Speaker, a recent poll taken in Edmonton showed that 62 percent of Edmontonians polled support this idea of school uniforms in the city's schools, yet another example of the grassroots support for this motion. If you're looking for other examples of the good that school uniforms is providing, take the United States. There have been a number of positive effects in the American districts with school uniform policies. These include reductions in fights between students, reductions in sexual offences, weapons offences, vandalism, and assaults, and they are not insignificant numbers. On the contrary, school uniforms have been linked to an

up to 36 percent decrease in overall school crime in those jurisdictions. They also reduce distractions in the classroom, identify individuals who should not be at that school, such as gang members or drug dealers, and reduce the visibility of economic differences between students.

The Cherry Hill elementary school in Baltimore was the first American school to reinstate school uniforms after the United States Supreme Court found in a 1969 decision that school dress codes violated children's right to free expression. Long Beach, California, was the first school district to put a uniform policy in place in 1994. These schools realized that the positive effects of a school uniform policy, like the substantial decrease in violence that I've just mentioned, is worth doing. In order to prevent challenges that the policy violates free expression, the district provided an opt-out clause for students as long as they obtained consent from their parents. I would like to note, Madam Speaker, that less than 1 percent of the students opted out of this policy. Since the Long Island school system took this first step, they've been followed by school districts in New York City, Seattle, Washington, Richmond, Kansas City, and Phoenix. In all, 12 American states have initiated school uniform policies.

Let's look again at Nellie McClung junior high school, which has an all-girls program. The inclusion of a school uniform policy has resulted in a more level playing field between its students and a more stable classroom environment. This has allowed a greater focus on the real reason students are there, and that is to learn, to grow, to better themselves as individuals, to recognize others as individuals, and to focus on what is within each person and not merely on the external appearances.

The image of neckties, crested wool blazers, and starched white shirts need no longer apply to school uniforms in the year 2000, as my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has mentioned. This is an image that existed earlier in the last century. It is simply not relevant for today's proposal. Indeed, Madam Speaker, a school uniform could be as simple as a T-shirt and a pair of khaki pants to achieve the objectives of the policy.

In some cases students recognize that school uniforms are a good thing and are asking for them all by themselves. Last year in Calgary a number of students organized a petition to support a school uniform policy. Why did they do this? Because they're aware of the social status and economic distinctions that exist in schools and the pressures that arise from this. Differences in clothing may not be the only thing kids are ostracized or picked on for, but it's definitely one of them, and I think that students like the ones from Calgary who organized the petition wanted others to know the pressures put on them and the negative outcomes that so frequently result from such behaviour.

Madam Speaker, I'm aware of the arguments that school uniform policies stifle students' freedom of expression. I would respond to these arguments in two ways. First, how one dresses is an important part of self-expression, but there are also other ways to express oneself as a student, by participating in drama, sports, music, debate, community groups, Scouts, 4-H, but more importantly in self-expression from within and the growth in confidence that results. Instituting school uniforms may even encourage other forms of self-expression as students begin to worry less about their clothes and more about developing their talents and expressing themselves as equals in their environment. Second, the uniform policy may only apply during school hours and would be determined by each school. Students can dress however they like after school and on weekends. This is no more a denial of free expression than the uniforms that nurses, bus drivers, and police officers wear when they are at work.

Madam Speaker, where school uniforms have been put in place,

they have been very beneficial to the students, the parents, and the community. Motion 503 will allow those who wish to learn whether or not the benefits of reduced class distinctions, lower rates of violence, fewer distractions in the classroom, and a more down-to-work attitude amongst students occur. The potential for the positive consequences of this motion is immense.

Before I close, I want to make a few comments on the quality of our education system. In Alberta, I am very proud to say, we have one of the best education systems in Canada and in the world, and that's a fact. Alberta students annually place at the top of Canada in student achievement, and we produce some of the great young minds of this country. These are just a few of the many initiatives that we've undertaken, and I think for the debate they needed to be mentioned.

So I will close by urging everyone here to look at the reasonable approach my colleague for Calgary-Fish Creek has taken in presenting this motion and to support it for the many benefits it will present to Albertans. Remember, what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is proposing is not mandatory but an encouragement to find ways of helping our young people to overcome the external pressures and listen to the voice from within.

Thank you.

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

MR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, would like to make some comments about the proposal in Motion 503, that a pilot project be conducted. In speaking to the motion, I was looking at a summary of the research by Keith King on school uniforms. King looked at the research that had been done and concluded that even though there was a lot of intuitive appeal and conventional wisdom that seemed to reinforce the belief that uniforms would bring more structure and would change behaviour, there was very little or "not much," I think are the words he used, "empirical data to support a cause-and-effect relationship between school uniforms and violence." I think that's important, an important research conclusion that the evidence is not out there, evidence that's strong enough to take the kind of action that's contemplated.

3:40

I would suggest, rather than a project with the kind of volunteer approach that that might include, that the government undertake a research project. I don't think it has to be costly. At this time of the year there are all kinds of graduate students in the universities of this province looking for research projects that they can conduct. In fact, probably with a small investment of funds a rather extensive project could be conducted. So rather than the project being described in Motion 503, there should be a research project.

King goes on to indicate the elements of that research project. First, he suggests that there should be some trend analysis, that in a particular school or in a particular school district you look at violence and what has been the long-term trend in violence. Is it at a peak? Is it waning? Just what are the conditions in schools vis-à-vis student violence. That trend analysis, as I indicated, might be at the school level or at the school district level.

He indicates that there should be a controlled experiment, that there should be some experiments with "those required to wear uniforms" and a control group, "those not required to wear uniforms," and that that kind of an experiment would yield additional data that could be put with the trend analysis in terms of making some decision.

Third – and I think this is the most important, Madam Speaker –

is that there should be a hard look at the "intervening variables." Just because there isn't empirical evidence right now supporting school uniforms doesn't mean that it's not there or that school uniforms aren't helpful in preventing violence and reducing school conflicts, but they should be looking at the relationships between parents and teachers and their perceptions regarding school uniforms. If parents overwhelmingly believe that it does that job, that's going to affect the outcome of any project.

The study should look at factors such as schools that have mandated school uniforms and those that haven't mandated them and how violence interacted in those situations, and they need to look at the conditions in the community. I think it would be quite a different policy were it enacted in the southern part of our province or in the communities north of this city, in terms of school violence, as opposed to some other places in the province, say the far north or the western school districts. So I think the kinds of community climates, those variables that would impact such a study, are also the kinds of information that King has argued should be brought to bear on any decision in terms of school uniforms.

So as much as I applaud having the project brought forward and the kind of enthusiasm that there is on the other side of the House for the project, I'm going to vote against it and urge the kind of careful approach that Keith King has suggested in terms of trend analysis and experimental research and a close look at the intervening variables.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

Citizens' Commission on the Future of Education

504. Mrs. MacBeth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to create an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education which would set goals and direction for education, acknowledging its fundamental importance to the prosperity and well-being of all Albertans and defining a clear vision for its future.

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

MRS. MACBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to address Motion 504 standing in my name on the Order Paper. I think there is no more important priority nor a more important focus for a provincial government in Canada than the improvement of public education. I think at a time when we perhaps as Canadians seem to be looking at ways to change some of the very fundamental characteristics of our country – certainly private health care is one of those that will change a very characteristic role of Canadians, but so is the issue of education.

I like to think and hearken back to our Constitution and what our Constitution speaks about. I would say that the three words that encapsulate the Canadian Constitution are "Peace, Order, and good Government." I've always thought that those three words give us the groundwork and the ground formation by which our public health care system is designed and our public education system is designed, unlike our neighbours to the south, in the United States, who for their own reasons and with every right to them have created a Constitution and a framework nationally which is very, very different from what we have in Canada. The three words that I think encapsulate the American Constitution are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There's no discussion about good government, about the issues of peace, about the issues of order, that we accept

as a society, as a community of Canadians rather than a more individualistic or perhaps libertarian point of view and point of substance.

We have come up with this resolution having spoken with many, many people across the province about the importance that they attach to public education, people who, for example, started the Save Our Schools petition, people who have watched an apparent priority of government move towards supporting private schools over a greater degree of dollar increase or percentage increase than public schools. People have said to us: we want to see public education valued, and we don't know what the direction of this government is when it comes to the future of public education.

So as a result of those conversations with Albertans, with those parents who are so involved in public education in our province, with the teachers, with agencies who look at the linkages between education and health care status – all of them have said: what is the purpose? Where is education going in this province? Where is the manifestation of the priority that certainly we in the Official Opposition place on public education and the improvement of public education as part of what is the most fundamental purpose of a provincial government?

3:50

We came up with the idea of an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education and hearkened back to the end of the Socred reign in Alberta in the late '60s, when the Social Credit government had put forward what was called the Worth commission with Dr. Wally Worth. I recall well that when the government changed in 1971, the Premier of the day then, Peter Lougheed, talked about when he created a department of advanced education for the first time in the province's history. He talked about looking at what had come out of that report by Dr. Worth in his consultations with Alberta and Albertans and wanted to embody those changes, that new direction into our education framework. As a result, he had a minister of education and a minister of advanced education, and together I think we saw public education grow in prominence, grow in building prosperity for our province, and grow in terms of a provincial priority above all else throughout those years.

Unfortunately, that sense of direction, Madam Speaker, has been in large part lost or at least changed towards much more one of enhanced support for private education in terms of what's coming, what's new. We see the same effect with charter schools. Many would say that charter schools are de facto private schools within the public system but getting full public funding.

As a result, we believe it is time to create an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education. Not only would the commission look at the goals and the focus for public education in our province and the priority and the pre-eminence that it takes as a focus for a provincial government, but as well it would say: these are the goals, and this is the way we are going to work in order to achieve those goals.

You know, there's been much discussion and inaccurate reflection in this Legislature in recent days on what was The Rainbow Report. The Rainbow Report was from a Premier's commission on the future of health care in this province, and it in fact did design a system of looking ahead, at that time to about 2005, looking ahead to what our health care system would look like or should look like as we reflected on times ahead. It then fell upon me, as the minister of health at the time, to put in place the action plan in order to achieve those goals.

The same process, we think, can be embodied in an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education, defining what those goals need to be, defining what are the goals of not just our school system and our postsecondary system but the goals leading up to

that, the goals for our children in this province from birth to age six, when they enter school, the goals for them when they are in the public education system by law, the goals for postsecondary education for those students who then avail themselves of that opportunity and the goals beyond.

You know, as we live in a much more and increasingly highly technological, information-based province and world, we have to have ways by which people can access information and learn how to access that information. So when we talk about goals for education, let's not be so small-minded as to think that those goals are only for the schooling ages of our young people. They are the goals of education which a provincial government must deliver on. Otherwise, it's not doing its job, Madam Speaker.

So who would make up this Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education? We believe there are many people who need to be a part of this commission. Certainly it would be to listen to Albertans to try and identify what are those goals, but I think one of the models that we might use is to take the initiative of the school superintendents, parents, teachers, and school trustees that came together, taking the provincial government's rather disastrous student achievement program they had come in with a year ago and recrafting that initiative to become a school improvement program. That was done by those groups coming together – the superintendents' association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Home and School Councils' Association – all of them coming together to look at a different way to take those dollars and get better value out of them.

[The Speaker in the chair]

MR. DICKSON: An excellent initiative.

MRS. MacBETH: That really was an excellent initiative, and we think that all of those groups need to be represented on an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education. As well, I think it's important that we add onto that some of the academic, research-oriented, and excellent people that we have in this province who are leaders in education theory and who could be part of this citizens' commission. Finally and as importantly, probably most importantly, are representatives of government, who would be very much a part of bringing this new vision and a sense of where it was heading together. So that the goals would be identified, the membership of the commission I think is very important.

You know, this government has used the mechanism of summits to address issues. On our side of the House we would say that in some cases those summits have been rather belittling of the size and scope of the issues at hand. Certainly we saw the impact of that with the health summit with Albertans from all over the province: very, very well intentioned; very well involved; some of them brand-new to the whole notion of health care. That was an important part of the discussion, but to simply lock those people in a room for two days and come up with a framework for education is not respectful of the importance that Albertans attach to an issue like health care.

I guess a further blow to those people and a discrediting that needs to be done of the summit as a mechanism in that instance is that when that group came forward and said that they didn't want to see more privatization of our health care system, the government then comes at its earliest opportunity to in fact enhance privatization of the system. Then the so-called consultation mechanism is flawed and fatally flawed and is frankly an insult to those who participated in it when they see that their own recommendations are not even accepted or embodied in the government's plans.

From the point of view of a consultation, our sense is that this

commission, the Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education, needs to be a longer term look at education and where it's heading and what kinds of things we can do, whether it's in an apprenticeship program, whether it is in postsecondary learning, whether it's in postgraduate learning, whether it is in early intervention, wherever. On the scale of all Albertans needing access to education, it would be a sense and a blueprint of where we want education to go in this province, because right now that blueprint does not exist. It may well have some flowery words from the wordsmiths of the government, but in terms of an action plan we need only look at some of the decisions that are described in the provincial budget of this past month and see where private schools are increasing at a rate of about 13 and a half percent in their funding, whereas the public system is rising between 8 and 9 percent in its funding.

We've got goals, we've got membership, and we've got methods of consultation. I think as well that once these goals have been defined, we need to look at: how will schools, how will teachers, how will postsecondary institutions, how will Albertans work to ensure that those goals are achieved? One of the key mechanisms in that is to put in place a method to measure achievement in terms of this plan that could be very tangible evidence if we were heading in the wrong direction. It would soon become evident because the monitoring of those goals would clearly show them to not be achieving what they intended to do. So as well as the goals, as well as a method by which the goals are going to be achieved, there must be a mechanism to measure and evaluate those goals.

4:00

I guess the fourth ingredient that we think is important is obviously to then look at the goals of education, look at how we're going to achieve them, how we're going to monitor them, and then look at what level of resources are we willing to commit as a province to the improvement of public education in our province. Once that decision is made, which is really a decision largely based on this Legislature, then each step, each program must in some way be enhancing or leading towards those goals. It doesn't mean you can do everything. We don't have limitless dollars, but the dollars that we are spending on public education and on education generally are to be used to improve the quality of education, improve the achievement of those goals in education so that at the end of our term as legislators the legacy will be that we could see and measure the improvement in our education rather than simply being rather empty in our praise by talking about the dollars that were spent or the marks that were achieved.

Achievement in education goes far beyond marks, Mr. Speaker. The model that I would think would be a very much more constructive model to follow, one that I had thought the government might pick up on in its Children's Forum report, is a model that looks at Albertans from the point of birth right through their learning years and beyond and assesses whether we're doing what we can do for them. If the government would only look at the work being done by the Calgary United Way, the work they have done to target young people and target resources so that not everybody gets the same resources but that those with the greatest need are helped the most to bring them up to a level where they may then be ready to enter school – that's what our Canadian Constitution talks about. It talks about peace, order, and good government, and good government is about taking those who are more frail or who are perhaps born into poverty and helping them get that leg up so that by the time they enter school, they are able to participate and learn as the other children who haven't had those difficulties are able to do.

The model the Calgary United Way has built, from zero to three

years, is a time of assessment, understanding what deficits may exist in that young person, and then taking the period from three to six to do early intervention. You know, if you talk to anybody in the health care system or anybody with any early education experience, they will tell you that they can sight and spot problems with young people and predict that those young people are going to have problems by the time they reach school age or by the time they reach leaving-school age, say at about 18. You can sight a lot of those problems right at the very beginning, at their birth often. In view of that, let's take that information and let's identify those young people. Whether it's an economic disadvantage, a health disadvantage, a social disadvantage of some kind, let's identify it and then use from ages three to six, as the Calgary United Way suggests, to do early intervention to try and alleviate the greatest amount of impact of that.

Then from ages six to 10 basic learning has to take place. Under the education model we have educators in this province who can certainly talk about that, and there are in fact some things going on that try to identify that but not with the focus that needs to occur.

Then from about nine to 13, the preteen years, are very important years with young people in picking up some of the skills they are going to need, some of the social skills and the prediction of the social skills that they will need before they enter teenagerhood. Then from 13 to 18, the mandatory term of our School Act, ensure that our young people are improving in their education, are learning the things they will need to be productive citizens in our community, are learning not just academic skills but very much the social skills in order to become good citizens.

That sets up a whole continuum, Mr. Speaker, and our proposal doesn't talk about ending there. Our proposal then talks about postsecondary and beyond, as we've said. We think it's a great model. It's one that the government apparently looked past as they were considering the Children's Forum, and it was a great opportunity to do that.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to respond to the private member's motion, Motion 504, brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Motion 504 would seek to establish a citizens' commission on the future of education.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to emphasize my conviction on the importance of education in our society and my unwavering support for learners and educators in Alberta. I also would like to take this opportunity to speak on some of the recent initiatives of the Department of Learning, especially our current public participation processes.

This government consults extensively with Albertans to set goals and direction for education. Through collaboration with our learning partners in this province, we have recently established a new vision for lifelong learning for Albertans. This vision is part of Alberta Learning's 2000-2003 business plan, which also identifies strategies toward achieving the vision.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is about involving Albertans – parents, teachers, educators, superintendents – in determining the future of education. This is already being done. Alberta Learning worked with partners to develop the 2000-2003 business plan and will continue to work with partners in the implementation of the plan. This government is committed to building partnerships that will contribute to quality of learning in Alberta.

To address the diverse needs of learners, Alberta Learning already partners with government, industry, professional and community

associations, and committees and councils associated with learning. For example, there is a commitment to work with school boards, the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, and the Alberta Teachers' Association to address the recommendations of the school councils' Next Steps report.

The Department of Learning is committed to working with the Council of Ministers of Education to implement a national agenda to support continued improvement of quality, accessible learning and performance measures. The department will also work with the federal government to improve the delivery and administration of financial assistance by harmonizing Alberta and federal student loan programs.

The Learning department's 2000-2003 business plan focuses on creating a flexible, responsive, and accessible education system for all Albertans. This government believes that a good education and a healthy start in life are the most important tools we can give our children to prepare them for a successful future.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, the Learning department's business plan also recognizes Alberta's postsecondary learning system. It must continue to expand the high-quality learning opportunity it provides to Albertans. The postsecondary sector will benefit from research funding from the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. This government is also committed to expanding student assistance dramatically.

Mr. Speaker, the 2000-2003 business plan is only one evidence of this government's commitment to education and to Alberta's participation in its future. This year's budget also reflects that dedication. Education is one of Alberta's biggest priorities. That's why this government has dramatically increased its investment in our education system. Total education spending in Alberta will reach \$4.6 billion in 2000-2001 and will grow to more than \$4.9 billion by 2002-2003.

MR. AMERY: How much?

MR. CAO: To \$4.9 billion.

The base program funding for Alberta Learning will climb by \$766 million, or about 19 percent, over the next three years. One of the fundamental objectives of this year's Learning budget is enhanced flexibility of funding. Alberta Learning has a plan to review school board funding to increase flexibility, recognize local needs, and enhance accountability for the outcomes.

This budget thoroughly addressed concerns raised by Alberta's postsecondary students. Student assistance made up the largest percentage increase, 22 percent or \$23 million, in 2000-2001, with almost 50 percent, or more than \$50 million, over the next three years. So the total financial assistance available to postsecondary students will be \$390 million this year.

By 2002-2003, scholarships, bursaries, and grants will be increased to \$56 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CAO: To \$56 million.

The budget also contains capital funding from Alberta Infrastructure to support schools and postsecondary institutions in this province. For the coming year \$160 million has been allocated to address priority projects to accommodate increased enrollments. This money will be used for repair, new facilities, innovation funding, and the preservation and modernization of existing facilities.

This budget reflects this government's willingness to work together with school boards, teachers, parents, students, postsecondary institutions, and industry to determine where investment is needed and how that investment should be made to ensure the best possible result. Spending more money will not improve the quality of our education system. We know that taxpayers' dollars must be directed to where they make a real difference.

This year's budget also clearly reflects this government's commitment to ensuring Albertans are prepared to meet the challenges in the new century head-on. It reflects this government's priority of lifelong learning and having an education system that continues to be responsive, accessible, and affordable for all Albertans. It reflects Albertans' priorities, the priorities that Albertans have disclosed at this government's many public consultations.

Mr. Speaker, we're listening to Albertans. There are a number of interdepartmental and cross-government initiatives to recognize education's fundamental importance to the prosperity and well-being of all Albertans, most of which have involved significant public consultation. These include Get Ready Alberta, People and Prosperity, the Alberta youth employment strategy, and the Alberta children's initiative. There are also many programs and reviews currently being implemented by the Department of Learning that involve education professionals and the public in determining the direction of education.

The Minister's Forum on Learning is a great example. It was held November 19 and 20, 1999, and 200 Albertans provided input on ways to foster lifelong learning in Alberta. The conference participants were high school, college, and university students, educators, continuing education providers, parents, industry and community representatives. The Minister's Forum on Learning featured internationally recognized speakers, who spoke on the future of education, and brainstorming sessions for participants. A report of the findings has just recently been issued. The forum provided an opportunity for community and learning stakeholders to advise the minister on priority issues. This forum demonstrated this government's willingness to consult Albertans on the future of learning in this province.

I would also like to speak about this government's committee on lifelong learning. I was asked, along with two colleagues, by the Minister of Learning to make recommendations on lifelong learning strategies. Our committee is presently consulting with people and organizations across the province on ways to encourage Albertans to keep learning throughout their lives. We are consulting with key stakeholders to review the current situation, identify gaps, and make recommendations on ways to help adults returning to learning improve their employment potential and realize their career goals. Based on what we hear, we will release a discussion paper in the spring and ask for public feedback. A final report will be developed by late summer.

Another important consultation was a school council review. This was a three-member MLA committee that worked with parents, teachers, principals, and other Albertans in a series of public forums held around the province last spring. These forums obtained input on school councils and where improvement could be made. Over 2,000 completed workbooks were returned to the Department of Learning. Overall, the committee found that school councils were working well and that there is a place for school councils in our education system. One important recommendation in the report was that the use of school fund-raising for core education programs be prohibited.

Mr. Speaker, there was also the Private Schools Funding Task Force. This task force conducted a provincewide public consultation process to provide Albertans with the opportunity to express their

views on how private schools should be funded. Throughout the review process the task force members met with hundreds of Albertans, listened to their views, and carefully considered their representations.

Another vehicle to gather Albertans' opinions on the learning issue was the 1997 School Facilities Task Force. This task force gathered Albertans' views on the provision of school facilities for Alberta students. Over 400 Albertans and educational partners participated in consultation meetings, and more than 100 written submissions were received. Information gathered from those public meetings was used to complete the task force's recommendations on the new school facility capital plan. All of their recommendations were accepted by the government. A new strategic direction for providing school facilities was adopted based on this consultation with Albertans, school boards, and education stakeholders.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, review committees and task forces are just two of many strategies that the government is pursuing to address increased demands in the classroom. The Department of Learning has also implemented a variety of programs and pilot projects to examine issues of significance to Albertans. To me the most exciting of these endeavours is AISI, the Alberta initiative for school improvement program. AISI is a new approach to supporting the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and the community to work together to introduce innovative and creative initiatives. School boards will have the autonomy and flexibility to propose a range of improvement strategies such as early reading or numeracy intervention, smaller class sizes, and stay-in-school programs. To support this initiative, \$66 million will be available from Alberta Learning's base funding this year for participating school jurisdictions.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CAO: It's \$66 million.

In one of the first AISI initiatives, the Edmonton public school board will pilot a class size reduction program. Along with Alberta Learning the board will look at the impact of teaching techniques and strategies that maximize student learning. Research and findings from this study and pilot project will help school boards across the province pursue class size reduction and other innovative projects eligible under AISI funding.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Learning has consistently worked with students, parents, educators, and administrators to ensure that the necessary policies are in place to achieve excellence in our learning system. Class size reduction, curriculum changes, increased funding, a commitment to lifelong learning: all of these initiatives were results of consultation with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this government has recognized that there are many challenges ahead and that meeting them depends on our ability to work with partners to anticipate, adapt, and develop a lifelong learning system. We have a long history of effective public consultation. I think our government and the Department of Learning have done an exemplary job of bringing stakeholders into the decision-making process, and the results have been positive. The Department of Learning is meeting challenges head-on in trying to make improvements that will ultimately help people learn. Without input and advice from stakeholders, this government wouldn't have been able to develop the progressive initiatives I've just discussed.

The intention of this motion is worthy. I'm glad that it was brought here today because we all know that education is of critical importance to the future of this province, and this government has

consistently shown in the past that we are willing to look at initiatives that will bring benefit to the people of this province and improve our existing system.

Mr. Speaker, I do not support Motion 504. A new commission would be duplicative and expensive. We can work from within the existing strengths of our learning system and still incorporate the spirit of the hon. member's motion. For that, thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today in favour of Motion 504, the Alberta citizens' commission.

As the Member for Edmonton-McClung and Leader of the Official Opposition noted in her remarks, the last time the province had a commission on education was the one that was tabled in 1972. That was entitled *Choice of Futures: a Future of Choices*. It's interesting, as you look at that document 30 years later, that some of the recommendations in that document are just now being implemented. Thirty years ago that document outlined the advantages of year-round schooling. Lo and behold, right now in this city there are some experiments with year-round schooling being undertaken. There was a rather careful look and some caution in *Choice of Futures* vis-a-vis the funding of schools, and the kinds of problems we faced with equity in the past number of years were foreshadowed in that document.

One of the things that was in that document and was rather interesting was the conception it had of possible ways of governing the system. There was a defining of the school system that would be a top-down system, a system that would be primarily micromanaged by the provincial government versus a system that would place a premium on local control. I think we know where we've gone these last few years. That top-down system has been the one that's taken over. I had an opportunity to talk to the author of that document and ask how he felt about the implementation of the recommendations, and he indicated that he thought that about 60 percent of the recommendations that were made had been acted upon.

I think it's time to look again at education in the province and to do it in a much different way, in a novel way, and that's what's proposed in the Alberta citizens' commission. Instead of as we had with the Worth commission, with the experts driving the study, determining the information that would be gathered, visiting around the province and interpreting what people were saying, this one turns it upside down and would make citizens paramount. They would have experts on tap that would help them provide the kind of academic and research advice that they needed while they were trying to make their deliberations. It's quite, I think, a different way of looking at a commission that would examine something as important as our public and separate school systems.

I think I would like to spend a couple of minutes looking at some of the things that have happened since Worth made that report in the province. The commission would be an opportunity not just to look ahead – and that's very important, trying to come up with a vision for the future – but it would also be an opportunity to look back, to look at the changes that have been undertaken, and to assess the worthiness of some of those changes. There have been many. If you look at governance alone, the role of school boards has been greatly modified in the last seven years by this government. Those boards that once had taxing authority, those boards that at one time could even hire their own chief superintendent without the government's blessing can no longer do so.

If you look at the Department of Learning, the Department of Learning has become much more controlling of the behaviour of

school boards and the behaviour of school principals. A lot of what is done now is in response to tests that are administered provincially, and judgments about the success of our schools are made by the Department of Learning in many instances based on those results.

There's been a move to school-based budgeting. They've been mandated across the province. They've had a great influence, I think, in parents coming to better understand how money is being spent, but they've also been introduced at a time of declining resources, so what looks like an opportunity for parent decision-making on the surface – in reality that freedom is not there.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but the time consideration for this item of business has now left us today.

4:30

head: Royal Assent

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the past we indicated that there would be several opportunities and several occasions on which we might not want to use our laptop computers. One of those occasions is the presence of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. So I would ask you to just turn them down.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois E. Hole, CM, and the Premier entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has, at its present sittings, passed certain bills to which, and in the name of the Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

THE CLERK: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 9 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000
- 12 Appropriation (Supplementary) Act, 2000

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated her assent]

THE CLERK: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Please sit.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading today.

I'll make a few brief comments about it. As members know, there was a reorganization of government last spring, and as part of that reorganization a number of agencies were added to the ministry. What this is, essentially, is an amendment to the act to allow the agencies to be added to the ministry and report through the Alberta Science and Research Authority. As you know, the Alberta Science and Research Authority is a provincial agency which is really involved as the senior science policy body in the province. It makes sure that the science policy corresponds to the business plans of the Ministry of Innovation and Science.

We have a number of board members in this agency. Just some of the names I would mention, that some of you may know, would be Bob Church, Ruth Collins-Nakai, Howard Tennant, Elizabeth Cannon, and Len Bolger, all high-level people, high-level Albertans. These are people who are recognized as leading Albertans in their field right across the province. This group works at arm's length from government to assist us with policy advice and helps the government to contribute to the Alberta advantage.

One of the groups that we added in the new bill is the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, AOSTRA. What we're doing through the amendment is expanding the mandate of that group. Certainly oil sands will be included, but we are going to call it the energy research council as we work through this. We think there are probably other areas of energy where we can spend money on research as well rather than just on the oil sands.

The other group that was added was the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. I'm just mentioning the main bodies. The Alberta Agricultural Research Institute will be part of the ministry. It will retain its name but become part of a larger life-science strategy. We believe it's important to move into the whole life-science area for several reasons. There's some good opportunity with the federal government, and they're looking at their genome project and the expansion of the genome project. Alberta is the second leading light in this whole area of gene research after Toronto. We want to move into the area of proteomics. As you know, there's a protein in each gene that controls the gene, and that's where the research is going. It's like Wayne Gretzky said: I go to where the puck will be, not where the puck is. That's what we want with our life-science strategy.

The forestry research institute we will include in this group as well, and it will be part of this whole ASRA mandate.

I think these changes and others that we are making will address the efficiency and effectiveness of requesting, of reviewing, and of funding science and research within this province. I believe we have

some exciting times in this province. We've got some good science. We've got exciting things happening as we go forward, Mr. Speaker, and I encourage the members to support this bill.

4:40

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister and his staff for keeping me up to date on initiatives in the Department of Innovation and Science. Bill 7 is the embodiment of a commitment that the government made to more closely integrate and consolidate research initiatives, science policy development, and the co-ordination of research funding in the province. Towards those ends I can support Bill 7. It seems that this government is able to identify correctly that the innovation system in this province will be strengthened by a co-ordination of effort when it comes to the government.

Now, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, which has now become the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority, seems to have an ever growing role. I have heard in general a fair degree of support for the government direction, particularly bringing the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute and the former AOSTRA, soon to be the Alberta Energy Research Institute, together under this central umbrella.

I've also heard some concerns raised, and I think they're worth noting on the record. From the agricultural side I've heard that perhaps there'll be a lack of sensitivity to agricultural issues, particularly as they vary across various regions of this province. I've also heard that people in the oil patch, particularly those that are recovering oil from the oil sands, are saying: well, there was a reason why AOSTRA was set up, and that was because of the particular needs and the particular dependency on research in being able to extract oil under very difficult conditions. Alberta for decades has really been a leader, in fact the world centre for the development of this kind of technology. Those criticisms have been voiced, and I think that the government in this regard should not be defensive about these criticisms but instead should look at them as a challenge to be met. I for one am confident that the voices raised or the concerns raised from the agricultural sector can be well dealt with, and I think the benefits of co-ordination will far outstrip the concerns about the lack of sensitivity.

When it comes to the oil sands, you know, we're talking about huge corporations with fairly deep pockets, with international partners and commitments. They're definitely big boys and girls who know how to look after their own interests. Now, that's not to say that we should abandon them, but I think it is to say that they've certainly benefited from a good partnership with government over the years in this province, and maybe it's time to lend some of that same support to some other partners and generate some new partnerships in the energy sector. Whether we're talking about fostering research when it comes to solar or wind or other kinds of energy, it seems to me that that's our future at some point. There's only a limited amount of oil in the ground or gas to be pumped or oil sands to be refined. Certainly moving towards the development of new technologies and exploiting new energy sources is a goal that's worth pursuing.

This bill is interesting for a couple of reasons, though, not just simply that it is bringing together the research funding of the government under this one umbrella and that the decision-making will be streamlined. I look forward to that, but it's also interesting for a couple of other reasons. The government for a long time has been talking about accountability in terms of board appointments, and what we have here is an interesting model. I'm still wondering

how this model will pan out, but it is an interesting model. It's one that if it works well and if it serves the people of this province well, we may want to try to apply it to some other areas of government activity.

As I understand the intent behind Bill 7, the new authority will create these three research institutes, and the members of the three institutes will be selected by the minister. There's nothing particularly unique about that. I mean, this government appoints hundreds and hundreds of Albertans to jobs by ministerial appointment every year. What is interesting is that the board chairs of these three institutes will be elected by members of the Assembly. I think that is fairly unique. I'm anxious to see how that works. We'll have a list of appointees that'll be put forward by ministerial order.

Now, how this list in itself is generated doesn't necessarily have to be a partisan activity. I talked to the minister about this, and I know that they're open to names. I hope they will use the same model that they've talked about using for the foundation to be established under Bill 1, and that is to have a broad search outside of government managed by a recruiting or a head-hunting firm, by a consulting company in any case, so that the appointments won't be tainted by any arguments of partisanship or patronage.

These names will be brought forward, they'll be appointed by the minister, and then from that group a chair will be nominated and then ultimately elected by members of the Assembly. That's an interesting model, and I'm anxious to see how it works and to see whether or not the people who are outside of government, the men and women who are working in Alberta's innovation system, the scientists and the researchers out there in our universities and in our corporations and in private business, will feel satisfied by this process and well served by it.

The government has also talked about the need for consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness when it comes to the co-ordination of science and technology policy. Bill 7, once it's passed, should aid in this regard, but again there's been some criticism raised, and I'd like to put it on record at second reading. Hopefully the minister will have a chance, as this bill proceeds, to reflect on these comments and perhaps address some of these concerns.

What I've heard from the business sector in this province that's involved in science and technology, particularly in the life sciences, biosciences, and communications technology, is that they're beginning to see this superstructure developing, what used to be ASRA. Although most of this criticism is usually leveled at the ARC, it spills over into ASRA as well. The criticism is simply this. The business sector is telling me that instead of simply facilitating research, instead of simply being a funding agent, instead of co-ordinating government policy, they're beginning to see government, through ARC and ASRA, as a competitor, that it looks as though they are more focused on commercial operations than they are on policy and as such have actually become an impediment to some business initiatives.

Now, there is no doubt a fine line that has to be walked here, because particularly ARC does some things that are very entrepreneurial and very commercial by design. We have to make sure that none of their business in fact gets in the way of Alberta business. While this government has said that they want to be more consistent and efficient and effective when it comes to science and technology policy, they've also said that they want to be out of the business of being in business.

Of course, being out of the business of being in business would be a good thing. We've just seen this week, Mr. Speaker, how the government has lost a few more million taxpayer dollars through the sale of the Centennial Food loan. I understand that this represents a loss of over \$11 million. When you add that up, it makes any of

the concerns raised about what's gone on in Ottawa sort of pale in comparison. I mean, you talk about billion-dollar boondoggles, and we certainly have had our experience right here in Alberta. The bad news is that there's about another \$1,800,000,000 worth of outstanding loans at risk in this province that are going to come home to roost one of these days. So if the government is really serious about being out of the business of being in business, let's just make sure that we're not going down some other path of getting into business through some back door or some side door through what's going on in the ASRA or the ARC.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that's been raised to me has come from academic circles. What some members of university research consortia are telling me is that they're very concerned about what they see as the overt politicization of science and science policy. It's one thing for the government to have an agenda, to articulate its agenda and to pursue it, but it's something else entirely to tie funding and research to these political agendas at the expense of academic freedom and independence. The concern they raise is one that I take to heart. I've spoken in this House before about the dangers of politics and science and the dangers, particularly, of a dominant ideology ignoring the pursuit of knowledge and instead replacing it with the abuse of science.

Science and the discovery of new knowledge is a social good in and of itself, and I think we have to do everything in this Assembly to make sure that we have an innovation system in this province that respects fundamental research and the creation of new knowledge. Then as times goes on, of course things will be put into place where we can take that knowledge, take that discovery, innovate from it, apply it, and even eventually, as the case may be, commercialize it.

Mr. Speaker, when I'm speaking of commercialization, I suppose that's another general query that I have about Bill 7. It does talk about some changes in terms of who owns intellectual property. It makes some changes in terms of the application of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in this province. I think it frees up the ability of other partners who are involved in research initiatives to claim ownership over the products of the scientific work. In other words, if a new process, a new product, or simply new knowledge is created that is funded through one of these government institutes, these partners now have a clearer path to claim some ownership or some share of ownership in what otherwise would be really a Crown asset, that being the intellectual property.

I'm hoping to spend some time in the research and science community over the next little while seeing whether or not Bill 7 has satisfied any of the concerns that have been raised. I want to be having my ears open to the concerns raised particularly from the academic community about the loss, the potential loss in any case, of academic freedom. I also want to pay attention to what I'm hearing from Alberta business regarding their sense that they're increasingly having to compete with big government when it comes to science and research.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be listening to those concerns and to see what the response is to Bill 7, but on balance I will say that the government taking control over the research agenda, at least from the standpoint of making sure that there's reduced duplication and increased co-ordination, makes some sense.

I think that if these other issues I've raised can be put to rest or can be satisfied, then Alberta taxpayers will be well served by this legislation, but I don't want to be in a particular rush to pass Bill 7. I don't feel the same urgency, let's say, here as I do in terms of supporting, for example, Bill 1, the government's initiative to create the new science and engineering foundation. I think that Bill 7 will

no doubt gain majority support in this Assembly during this session. I see no reason to unduly impede it, but I do want to take some time, as I said, meeting with some members of the community that have a stake in science and research and making sure that their concerns are (a) well understood and (b) addressed.

As this bill proceeds through the Assembly, I look forward to the minister responding to some of these concerns. I have faith that he will, because that has been his track record since he became the minister of this department.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that other members do the same: set up a meeting or two with the scientists and the businesspeople who are involved in research in their own constituencies and get some feedback on Bill 7 so that we can make sure we get this one right the first time.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak to the contents of Bill 7 and to the principles of Bill 7 and how it applies to the initiative that's under way to basically broaden the approach of scientific research in our province. The combination of this change that's going to draw together an administrative group to look over and to deal with the dollars that are being put into the heritage foundation money is a really good approach.

The thing that we have to watch in the creation of these bodies is the fact that they are representative and that they do contain within their membership the broad-based understanding of and appreciation for the different sectors that are going to be dealt with in the co-ordination and the evaluation of research projects that come to them and have to be looked at. They're going to be responsible as well for setting direction and that. If we can look at it from the perspective of how the makeup of that board will deal with the broad perspective of research and development and the advancement of that primary research component in Alberta, that would be really good. We need to have some criteria included in here in the development of the board membership that would allow us to look at that.

The other thing I would like to suggest is that we have to have a clear representation within the presentation and within the understanding and the mandate of the authority to look at the balance that comes between a kind of frontier-expanding primary research and the research, then, that goes into developing and taking new-concept research results and making and developing applications for those research-based activities. This has to be put in there. We have to have that mix that comes in there.

I think the model that we want to look at is the work that's being done through the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research authority, because they've been able to really pull together some very active co-operative programs between funding at the provincial level, at the federal level, from some of the private sources as well, and really have developed a viable medical research program here. As this group works and takes the earnings that are going to come out of our Alberta heritage fund endowment, this would be a really good model that this authority could look at in terms of developing a viable science and technology research component within our province.

One of the things that we look at in here is the inclusion of the agriculture research component under this. The Agricultural Research Institute has had a very good relationship with the agricultural community, with the commissions and support groups in agriculture. They've been very open and very willing to work with these groups in developing research agendas and direction for

research. I could think that if they get involved here and they can take that philosophy and make sure that it works in this new environment as well, it would be worth making sure that opportunity is provided to them, because as we look at their successes, we want to make sure that being put under this new body doesn't in any way hinder or restrict their ability to continue to work at the forefront of both our conceptual agricultural research area and at the applications areas of our research as well.

5:00

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I think we're going to have to look at this in the context of how it will improve the co-ordination and management of our research program across the province as well as across the disciplines that are going to be involved in this. If you look at it from the perspective of how it can be brought in and implemented in that context, they'll now have the dollars that come out of the new heritage fund endowment as well as the dollars that I assume were originally and have continuously been put into the other organizations, that are now going to be included in the umbrella under this. So what we'll have is those efforts that have to be looked at: how the dollars get directed and whether or not they are continued to be focused in the areas of the amalgamated authorities that are being brought together.

So, Mr. Speaker, again I say that this is the kind of bill that puts in place a structure. It doesn't talk a lot about the philosophy that's behind it, and that philosophy is going to be determined by the members that get appointed to the board. Then what we have to do is look at it from the perspective of getting a balance there that'll give us the direction for our research in the science and technology area that will continue to promote that growth and the advancement of these areas in Alberta.

Now, we've got a good reputation in our universities. We've got a good reputation in some of our research centres, and we've got good co-operative efforts being provided by a lot of our industries, that are essentially giving us an opportunity to really move Alberta into the forefront of a science and technology research component. It's a matter of getting that critical mass in place. As we put Bill 7 and Bill 1 together, we'll be able to see a real opportunity develop for Alberta to generate that critical mass, that's necessary to be a world player in the area of research in science and technology. So I hope, as we go through this, that almost all members in the Legislature get support from their communities and we can then move this into an active growth component of our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 7 from my understanding of it. I've always supported research, and I think that's been a focus of this Legislature in this session with, actually, the bill I spoke on yesterday, Bill 1. Here we have Bill 7, which talks about the combining, actually, the co-ordination of some other research departments – agriculture, energy and forestry, to my knowledge.

You know, at first glance one would consider that it's good to co-ordinate those sections. Are these all going to be located in the same building? How is this going to come about? Is this going to be a major kerfuffle within the department? Do we have people moving buildings, offices, et cetera? I'm interested in the practical aspect of co-ordinating these three.

One of the things that may come from this that I hope will be good – because I don't want agriculture lost in the shuffle. I'm quite sure

it won't be, but when we look at research for agriculture, I think it has a bit of a different focus than energy and forestry. With energy having so many big companies involved and big corporations and with forestry involved with so many corporations, et cetera, I have to be concerned about agriculture because those are several individuals.

The average farmer doesn't have the time or the inclination of course – well, maybe the inclination, but certainly not the time – to do good research. They do depend on the government to that well, and different industries maybe from the value-added sector that would promote a certain product. Generally speaking, when you are speaking of research for agriculture and things that will improve the life of the farmer, the quality of the product they can put out, the versatility of that product, that has to come from, I would hope, the research that will be encompassed in Bill 7.

When the minister listed some of the people that will be on that authority, a couple of the names I recognized. That's impressive work. Certainly the work of Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai I am familiar with. I guess I want to ask, though – I don't want agriculture lost within this, and my hope is that in fact the research for agriculture will be improved because maybe it will be more focused.

I guess one of the things that certainly has come up in my constituency and people have been asking me about – and I'm wondering if the minister knows if this is going to be one of the focuses of this authority – will be the issue of genetically modified organisms. I'm glad the minister of energy is paying attention because he's wondering about those genetically modified organisms.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're called Liberals.

MRS. SOETAERT: We're throwing insults, but that's okay, Mr. Speaker; we have broad shoulders in here.

I was actually trying to support the minister's bill while I questioned some of the things about agriculture.

I also want to ask about the forestry within that. I also wonder about the research of that, the allocations of it, the abilities for different people to clear cut without any research done. In fact, one of the interesting things that has come to my attention is the different sectors and their impact on the environment. I am wondering: that's something that certainly should be researched and worked co-operatively with those areas.

As we look at the combining of these three areas, I am hoping that there will be a balance. I don't want the agriculture industry to be forgotten. There are new products, new knowledge, and I think everyone here – I'm hoping everyone here – has an appreciation of new knowledge that may come out of this. Within that, one of the parts I read is the reality that – maybe this needs explanation, but if as a government we are paying for the research, do we not own the product then? Or is this going to be negotiable under this authority? Maybe I'm not reading it as clearly as I should, but there is a section in here which says that those kinds of resources or any money from it, that it will be the authority's decision as to how to spend or use that money. My question is: would it not be part of the Crown's benefit since it has been sponsored by this government?

5:10

I had a few other things to point out about this bill. You know, Mr. Speaker, on this board there will be an MLA, which is common for many of these authorities. My question, and I'm sure the hon. minister is really going to consider this: there's never been an MLA from the opposition benches on one of those boards.

AN HON. MEMBER: Correct.

MRS. SOETAERT: And he says I'm correct in that. I'm correct in a lot of things.

You know what? If he goes looking for well-qualified, willing, intelligent people, well, there are a good 16 sitting over here you can pick from. And you know what? They'd work hard. We know how to put in the hours. We'd be vocal. [interjection] No, those guys didn't even wake up when I said that. So no, I'm for folks sitting over here.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've made a few good suggestions to the minister. I've expressed my concern about the loss of agriculture. I don't want it lost in this combining because it doesn't have one big industry focused on just that, as the others do.

So with those concerns and a good suggestion for an MLA that could sit on that authority, an excellent suggestion: the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the Member for Lethbridge-East, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I mean, we've got them.

With those few comments I will adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

[Adjourned debate March 13: Mr. Smith]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that now may be an appropriate time to move the question on Bill 1.

MRS. SOETAERT: There's no question. There are more speakers.

MR. SMITH: Isn't it if the Assembly is prepared to accept the question that we vote on it and then move on?

MRS. SOETAERT: No, we're not prepared. You were speaking last.

MR. SMITH: Okay. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to get in a few minutes of comments on the philosophy, I guess, in the approach of Bill 1. We've seen that with the focus that we have on research in the province and with our university system, we have the opportunity to really be participants in a very valid and very active program to contribute to the scientific and technological knowledge of the world, of our country.

Bill 1 is going to make a statement on behalf of all Albertans that this is a direction that we condone and that we really support in the context of how it's going to bring about an increase in diversification in our province and that it will be able to allow us to move into some of the other areas that are contributing to the advance of both our province and the science- and research-based activities that are in it.

Mr. Speaker, we had a chance to discuss this bill the other night with the Minister of Learning, and we were talking about how it would work in with the universities in our province. We were talking, also, in that context about how successful our universities have been in attracting the chairs of the federal program that was going to expand the focus on our researchers and our universities and the direction that those universities take in their research.

We've been able to create a number of centres of excellence now through that program here in Alberta, and the dollars that will come out of this foundation and the endowment that's created as its basis will really now provide an opportunity for those centres to look for, to search out funding that will come from Alberta but also on a matching level from other places in Canada or around the world. This will contribute to the fact that the lead scientists that are here will then be able to attract graduate students and encourage undergraduate students in our universities now to look at the opportunities that are there for them as they move into graduate work, into research work.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any question that, you know, the more scientists we can train in our province, the more likely we are that they'll stay here and conduct their research activities here. The dollars that will be provided through this endowment will give them that opportunity to really flourish here in Alberta and stay in our province and contribute to the advancement of our research, commercialization, and academic environments.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through and look at this, the thing that's going to be important – as a former faculty member at the university I can tell you that when we could draw our undergraduate students into our research programs, get them involved either as part-time students during the academic year or through summer employment opportunities, they really began to shine as students. They began to take an interest in the direction that what they were learning in the classroom could take. I think it effectively made them much better students and in the end much better graduates so that when they did go out into the workplace, they had a little bit of an understanding and appreciation for how concepts that they learned in the classroom could actually be made into a workable practice when they went out into the work world. So they were always there and they were always available to help to improve and create better employees for the companies and the businesses, the agencies that were looking for them to come out and make a contribution.

So these are the kinds of ideas that are really exciting about this bill and the fact that it will give us a chance to see our academic community, our research community, really begin to move out into the forefront, as we've seen with our medical facilities with the support of the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. That's basically given us that core size, that takeoff size that was needed to really create those good research initiatives. Let's hope that over the next four or five years this program and the moneys that are coming out of the heritage foundation for science and engineering will be able to create that same core level of expertise and that same mass that gives them a critical takeoff into a very stable and ongoing research program in our province.

I think that we'll see everybody at the universities in this province looking at this and saying: you know, the government is making quite a commitment now to improve and sustain and maintain the research efforts that have been undertaken at our universities. They'll be looking at this as a signal to try and expand their programs, to look at new concepts, to explore some of the ideas that have now been languishing in the back of their mind because they're funded to do other things. They'll now be able to pursue those ideas with funding through this.

5:20

We should be able to see the graduate programs and the research programs at our universities really grow in response to this, especially with what we're hearing in terms of some of the discussions, that this actual endowment is potentially going to grow over the next few years from the \$500 million that's set aside here. We'll be able

to then have a growing amount of allocatable dollars on a yearly basis. Potentially at the start this could give us \$20 million, \$30 million to \$40 million on an annual basis. Depending upon interest rates and earnings, that could grow, and if the endowment itself grows, I think this is just one of the most exciting things that we can talk about in terms of the mandate of this session of the Legislature.

I hope that everybody supports this bill as we move it through the process and that we do it in a way that our researchers can feel that we made that commitment, that we were willing to move it through so that the dollars can be set aside and we can then have it effective at an earlier date rather than a delayed date because of the activities here.

So with that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just before I ask that the question be put, I'd like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House and the last colleague in particular. I appreciated your good comments.

I think that this is an historic bill. Just as in 1982 the HFMR was an historic bill, so this year, 2000, is the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. I want to say that it couldn't have been done without the Premier's support and his insistence and his vision that this is a positive issue.

I thank everybody, and I'd like to call for the question on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I move that the House now stand adjourned and reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, will all hon. members in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Carried. The Assembly stands adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]