

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 5, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Xu Youfang, senior adviser of Alberta's sister province in China, Heilongjiang, along with members of his delegation. He is accompanied today by Mr. Gu Huaming, consul general of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier had an opportunity to host His Excellency over lunch and conveyed to him the importance of the trip that he led, the Alberta mission to Heilongjiang last year and how impressed he was by the dramatic and very positive changes that he saw in Heilongjiang. We'll celebrate the 20th anniversary of our twinning with Heilongjiang next year. I'm very pleased that His Excellency is in Alberta today to see the exciting growth in our province, and I wish him and his colleagues a very pleasant and a very productive visit.

I would ask that our honoured guests, who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, please rise and receive the very traditional welcome of this Legislature.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Robert Smolen, undersecretary of state, presidential chancellery from Warsaw, Poland; Mr. Krzysztof Smyk, Polish consul general from Vancouver; Mr. Jarek Nowinka, president of the Canadian Polish Congress of Alberta; Mr. Zygmunt Potocki, vice-president of the Canadian Polish Congress from Calgary; Mr. John Szumlansky, the vice-president of the Canadian Polish Congress, Alberta branch; and Mr. Archie Grover, former Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Smolen is in Alberta to attend some of the exciting events that are being held during Polish Week in Edmonton March 30 to April 8 of this year. Polish Week in Edmonton has been organized by the Polish Culture Society of Edmonton with support from Polish organizations and the University of Alberta.

They're seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've been advised that we have quite a list today, so let's be patient.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table today a petition from very wise and fair-minded young Albertans who have signed this petition in support of the intent of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to present on behalf of residents of Fort McMurray in support of Bill 11. It reads that they

urge the Government of Alberta to provide respective Regional Health Authorities with the flexibility necessary to provide the delivery of publicly funded, publicly administered overnight surgical services cost-effectively and efficiently.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again have the pleasure to rise and file with you a petition signed by 272 Edmontonians and citizens from Spruce Grove, Carvel, Stony Plain, and Sherwood Park. They are all in unanimous support of the resolution that reads: "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 318 people from the Lethbridge, Redcliff, Medicine Hat, Raymond, Coaldale, Fort Macleod, Picture Butte, Cardston, Pincher Creek, and Taber areas. In fact, with today's tablings that'll be 1,607, totaling so far 40,033 that we've brought here, wise people from Alberta who believe in democracy and the ability to petition. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly from 325 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, St. Albert, and Jasper. These individual citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to "urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta on behalf of 210 Albertans from Fairview, Chauvin, Beaverlodge, Hythe, Fox Creek, and Wembley. This is urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today as well to rise and table a petition signed by 247 citizens of Alberta from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, Onoway, and Stony Plain. These citizens implore that the Legislative Assembly "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present to the Assembly a petition that's been signed by 209 residents of Calgary and Canmore. Not only don't they like Bill 11; they don't want closure on debate on the bill either. Their petition is:

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

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 245 Albertans from Edmonton, Lethbridge, Calgary, and Spruce Grove. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "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." With this submission the number of signatures on the petition is well over 10,000.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petitions in my name be read back to the Legislative Assembly.

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.

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-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition standing in my name on the Order Paper be now read and received.

Thank you.

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-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to have now read and received the petition I tabled yesterday, which reads:

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 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.

1:40

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am requesting two read-backs today, please. The first is a petition that I presented on April 4 in support of mature women's health, and the second petition, also presented on April 4, was signed by a number of citizens who are against private health care.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge 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.

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-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition I presented on April 4 urging the government to stop promoting private 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 Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the undermining of public health care that's happening in this province be now read and received.

Thank you.

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-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday urging the government not to support private 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-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to ask that the

petition I tabled yesterday urging the government to support public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I introduced yesterday be now 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-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to be read back today. They're both in relation to the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care and request that it be stopped. The first petition is signed by 265 Albertans, and the second petition is signed by 154 Albertans.

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.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition from 439 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped that I presented to the House on Tuesday, April 4 be now read and received.

Thank you.

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 Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request at this time that the petition I presented on April 4 registering opposition to private health care be now read and received, please.

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 very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly yesterday

expressing the concern of Albertans regarding this government's health care privatization scheme 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.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this afternoon I would like to table five copies of an independent legal review of Bill 11 by Chris Levy, professor of law at the University of Calgary. The review concludes that Bill 11 does not violate any of the principles of the Canada Health Act and indeed is in full compliance with the Canada Health Act in its overall scheme.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter recently sent to the Leader of the Official Opposition pertaining to the disposition of records from her time as minister of health.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of regional health authorities in the province for the year ended March 31, 1999. I provided the required number of copies for tabling earlier to the Clerk's office.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the Safety Codes Council 1999 annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to file with the Assembly a letter of congratulations to the University of Alberta Bears hockey team. On Sunday, March 6 in Saskatoon the Bears won the second straight CIAU men's hockey championship. The latest win brings the total of crowns in Bears hockey to 10, a remarkable accomplishment that demonstrates the U of A's excellence in sports and, indeed, Alberta's tradition of excellence in sports.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table information from the latest report of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in which the minister will note the drop in hospital costs and hospital funding in Alberta in the mid-1990s.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. The first one is a summary of the expenses totaling \$17,064.68, which was the cost of all advertising undertaken by the official Liberal opposition in opposition to Bill 11, and we'll be tabling some incidental expenses as we have them.

The next one is for the benefit of the Premier. I'm tabling a checklist that the Premier can simply fill in, listing the expenses that the government has incurred with respect to promoting and proselytizing Bill 11.

The third item I'm tabling is a petition signed by . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, the Premier's speaking so loudly, I can't hear myself speak.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I think we're going to ask for some attention. Everybody who participated in Tabling Returns and Reports today violated the rules of this House. Everyone. Now, under Tabling Returns and Reports you table them with no editorial comment, and if the hon. members want to go outside and continue the debate, they're invited to do so.

Tabling Returns and Reports: table them without any editorial comment. Then there's no need for any debate. There's no need for any chitchatter. Without editorial comment: that's the rule. That's to be enforced by the various House leaders who have violated their enforcement procedures with respect to this matter.

So let's go on with no editorial comment.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

MR. DICKSON: Next, I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of a message signed by 606 people in the Vermilion area registering opposition to the privatization of health care.

The final item I'm tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a set of letters from 67 correspondents in the city of Medicine Hat registering their opposition to Bill 11 and the private health care initiative of the government.

Thank you.

1:50

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I have three tablings today. My first one is an excerpt from the *Camsell Mosaic* about a public hospital in Alberta with a rich and majestic history of service to the people of Alberta which the government is now proposing to sell for a dollar.

My second tabling. Further to the Premier's suggestion yesterday that I should tour Alberta's health facilities, I am pleased to table today . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, just table it, and let's move on.

MRS. SLOAN: . . . five copies of my graduate and registered nursing diploma, signifying that I have spent more hours in health care facilities . . .

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from a constituent, Joan Leslie, which I will table without comment.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a media release from the minister of health in Ontario announcing the closure of two private hospitals in order to protect Ontario's public health care system.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a number of letters today that are all opposed to the Genesis proposal for Spray Lakes. They are from Maegan Hawkes of Calgary, Chris Fitznar of Banff, Lance Steinke of Canmore, Kevin Milliken of Canmore, and also from Bill Marshall of Canmore.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have for tablings this afternoon, some postdebate feedback for the Premier: copies of the Bill 11 householder marked returned to the Premier, one with a cartoon that says, "We said no damn it!"

Mr. Speaker, my last tabling is from a constituent of mine, Marcel Gibello, who asks that I please table the following letter in the Legislature in regards to Calgary's push for private MRIs.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first one is the strike time line from November 8 until April 5 for the strikers that are having job action with the *Calgary Herald*.

The second is the Alberta Labour Relations Board decision still pending regarding that unfortunate labour dispute.

The third one is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. This is the complete version of the Conrad Black/Andy Marshall confrontation as well as it can be heard. This is a transcript for all hon. members of the Assembly to have.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I'm sure there's somebody else who wants to participate in tablings today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings today. The first one is a letter to the minister of health from Dr. W.A. Fuller from Athabasca. It's a three-page letter opposing Bill 11 and giving reasons for it.

The second letter is from one of my constituents, E.J. Kowal, again opposing Bill 11, a fairly extensive two-page letter.

The third one is one from David Finch from Calgary, vehemently opposing Bill 11 and asking the Premier to read his letter carefully.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I have to make a correction to what I said a little earlier. There were actually two members today who did follow the rules with respect to tablings: the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who was absolutely correct, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. All others failed.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 60 senior high school students from across this province who are visiting the Legislature with the Forum for Young Albertans. The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning experience which provides the opportunity for close study of provincial and local politics. Joining this group of enthusiastic young Albertans is Mr. Blair Stolz, executive director for the Forum for Young Albertans, and group leaders Tanya, Jeff, Anne Marie, and Richard. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests visiting from Warrington in Cheshire, England. They are concluding a two month long world tour and depart for the United Kingdom tomorrow. Colonel Bill and Rosie Spiegelberg are in the members'

gallery. I would invite them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly students, teachers, and parents from Avondale school in Grande Prairie. The students are accompanied by teachers Paul Waite and Mrs. Joanne Bordeniuk and parents Mr. and Mrs. Don and Brenda Girard, Mrs. Pat Proudfoot, Mrs. Cecilia Littleton, Mrs. Irene Gaw, Mr. Don Sellick, Mr. Kevin Pringnitz, Mr. Paul Plant, and Dorothy Brown. They're scheduled to be seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that if they are here, they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to have two school groups from the Wainwright constituency today, the first being a group of talented grade 5 students from the Sedgewick Seventh Day Adventist private school. They are accompanied by Debi Anderson and Sherilyn Grovet. I welcome them to the Legislature to watch government in action. They're in the members' gallery. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second group, Mr. Speaker, is a delightful group of students from the Wainwright high school. They are accompanied by teacher Brent Allen. They are in the members' gallery. They are here to observe the Assembly in action, and I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'm pleased to introduce to this Assembly two former pages of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta who are seated in the members' gallery. Karen Diepeveen served as page from November of 1999 to December of 1999. Karen is currently completing her grade 12 at the Edmonton Christian high school. Also joining us this afternoon is Agnes Mickus, a former Speaker's page from November 1998 to May 1999. Agnes is also completing her grade 12 at Maurice-Lavallee. We are pleased that they are able to view this Assembly from a different perspective this afternoon. I would ask them to please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Erin Wiley. Erin is a grade 10 student at McNally high school. She's enrolled in the international baccalaureate program there. She is diligent, conscientious, and she's a graduate of Holyrood elementary school and Kenilworth junior high. Erin has been selected to represent Edmonton-Gold Bar in Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. She is present in the public gallery. I would now ask her to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

2:00

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a longtime constituent and friend, Mr. John Webster. I had the pleasure today of meeting with Mr. Webster, along with Miss Karen Grose and Mr. Larry Stevens. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce three very special visitors from Calgary today. These prominent individuals are nationally renowned journalists. Today is the 149th day of the *Calgary Herald* dispute. Today these individuals met with all caucuses represented in this House to draw their attention to Alberta's poor labour laws and seek their support in concluding their first collective agreement. These journalists are also asking the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to show some leadership in the resolution of their first collective agreement.

They are seated in the public gallery. They are Andy Marshall, president of CEP local 115A; Brian Brennan, a renowned journalist; and Murray Lamb, a visitor from British Columbia. I request that the guests now please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you two constituents of mine that I had the pleasure of meeting with today. They are Laura Shutiak and Paul Drohan. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Expansion of the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, government refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall, and now the Premier's private health care privatization campaign: each boondoggle bears this Premier's hallmarks of misrepresentation, blanked-out pages, hidden documents, and in the end costs taxpayers a bundle. My questions are to the Premier. Given the Premier's tendency to blank out pages and hide taxpayer-funded reports, are the Premier and his minister hiding any documents that examine private hospital policy in other provinces of Canada?

MR. KLEIN: The answer to the question, Mr. Speaker, is no.

You know, we just learned that there are 155 boxes of documents from the former minister of health who is now the Liberal leader. I understand she has consented to release those to the archives, and perhaps she might want to release those to the House, so we can get an idea of where she was coming from. We don't know today where she's coming from. Perhaps those documents that have been kept in locked boxes for something like 10 years could shed some light on where the minister was coming from then.

I know, for instance, that she removed a whole bunch of hospital signs along the highways so that people wouldn't know whether they were going to a hospital or to, as she described it then, a community health centre or a community clinic, Mr. Speaker. You know, we would like to know what her rationale was at that particular time. We would like to have access to those documents.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are not FOIPable, and for the viewing public, FOIPable means that they are not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. They use it against us all the time, but they will not table their traveling expenses. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo spent more per kilometre than any other MLA in the smallest constituency in the province.

You know, people run that constituency at noon hour. They run the length for their exercise, yet he spent about \$45,000 traveling the length, the width, and the breadth of his constituency. And you want to talk about hiding things. You know, hiding things. I don't know. How much did this little odometer that he had on his pocket cost? What does he charge up? Does he charge a penny a stride? They want to talk about hiding things. Mr. Speaker, these are the people who are hiding things.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in the preamble made some reference to West Edmonton Mall. I don't know; I'd like to look at the Blues to see what reference was made. This is before the courts at the present time, and I'd have your indulgence in telling the leader that they should watch what they say about this case.

MRS. MacBETH: Getting back to the question that the Premier refuses to answer, Mr. Speaker, why are the Premier and his government misleading Albertans by saying that his policy on private surgical facilities is the same as the other provinces?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this government is not misleading anyone at all. But, yes, when we talk about – and this is Liberal vicious, malicious misinformation. We don't know how much this cost, but I'm going to read from it. It says: Why Bill 11 Is the Wrong Prescription for Alberta. This handout, this publicly paid for piece of trash says that it “legalizes private, for-profit hospitals.” That, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjection] Well, no, no. I'm going to address that later. It “creates a two-tier health care system,” it “opens the door to extra charges without protecting patients,” and it “permits the queue-jumping that is going on today.”

Mr. Speaker, I read from *Beauchesne*. These are the words that we're allowed to use. That's a “barefaced falsehood.” That is deception, and it purports to “deceive.” It is “dishonest.” It is “false.” It is “fraudulent.” It is “indecent.” It is “insincere.” It is “malicious.” It is “misinforming.” It is “misleading.” It purportedly “misled.” It's “not telling the truth.” It is “phony.” It is “scandalous.” It is “rotten.” It is a “smokescreen.” It is a “stinker.” It is “stupid.” It is “untrue” and “untruthful.” And, you know, one last phrase I could use: “The pig has nothing left but a squeak.”

MRS. MacBETH: Let's get back to the issues that are on the minds of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat the question about the other provinces, that the Premier has misrepresented the laws that are in place in other provinces. Perhaps I can brush up the Premier's memory by tabling a document from his own department of health on the background of private facilities in other provinces and ask: why is he misleading Albertans, saying that his policy is consistent with the provinces when, in fact, his own government document shows that there are huge differences between what other provinces are doing and what this Premier is doing with his private hospital policy?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we tabled some time ago in the Legislature legislation that has been introduced and passed by other

provinces: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario. In my recent meeting with the Prime Minister we agreed that we would sit down and review all of this legislation to make sure that there is indeed some consistency in the legislation. All of that legislation, by the way, refers and alludes to contracting out minor surgeries to private clinics. We want to know: is our legislation consistent with that in British Columbia, in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba, in Ontario?

What we want to do across this country, Mr. Speaker, is really to have an intelligent review of the situation to end the patchwork of legislation that exists across the country where certain things are allowed in one province but for some reason are not allowed in another province. The Prime Minister has agreed to that.

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the document which we tabled today, which of course the government prepared in terms of a survey of the other provinces, says quite a different story than what the Premier might have had in his little discussion with the Prime Minister.

Given that the government's own report says, and I quote: ministry officials in British Columbia consistently indicate that there are no facilities that provide insured or uninsured surgical services that require an extended stay, end quote, why would this Premier continue to mislead Albertans by saying that his Alberta private hospital policy doesn't completely contradict the British Columbia one?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospital policy, and that question is absolutely irrelevant.

Specific to the question, in our research there is nothing in any of the legislation as it pertains to British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, or Ontario that prohibits overnight stays. As a matter of fact, in Ontario, as I understand it, there are about three clinics that do accommodate overnight stays under the publicly funded health care system.

I've read various letters saying that the Saskatchewan legislation prohibits overnight stays, but if you read the legislation very carefully, there is nothing in that legislation, Mr. Speaker, that prohibits overnight stays, nor is there anything in the ND government's legislation from British Columbia that prohibits overnight stays, nor is there any in Manitoba, and certainly there is nothing in Ontario, where in fact the bill, introduced by a Liberal cabinet minister at the time, Elinor Caplan, is entitled the Private Hospitals Act.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this government's own report says that, and I quote, Saskatchewan Health indicates there is no provision of either insured or uninsured surgical services requiring extended stays, why does the Premier continue to mislead Albertans into thinking that his Alberta hospitals policy isn't completely inconsistent with Saskatchewan's?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, our statement relative to the Saskatchewan legislation is quite true. There is nothing in their legislation that prohibits overnight stays.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness elaborate on this issue.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan government has in effect passed and proclaimed the Health Facilities Licensing Act. As far as overnight stays are concerned, there is nothing in the legislation which prohibits overnight stays. It provides for the licensing of clinics in a very general way without any prohibition with respect to overnight or day clinics.

There are a number of unlicensed facilities operating in Saskatchewan as well. They are approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They are the Horizon eye centre, Regina, Saskatchewan, and the Midwest Laser Centre, Regina, Saskatchewan, which does facial plastic surgery, laser work. There's also the Gimbel Eye Centre in Saskatoon.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's move on to Manitoba. Manitoba says that there are no facilities that are providing extended stay services, yet this government wants to do it in its legislation. Why is the Premier misleading the people of this province by saying that his legislation is consistent with Manitoba when the exact opposite is true?

MR. KLEIN: The exact opposite is not true. As a matter of fact, I was in Winnipeg only two days ago and had a long discussion with Gary Filmon about this particular piece of legislation. It is probably the most comprehensive legislation relative to the regulation and legislation related to surgical facilities, again introduced not by the Conservatives but by the socialist NDs under Howard Pawley in Manitoba. Again, there is no prohibition. No prohibition.

Yes, former Premier Filmon admitted that there are no facilities that offer overnight stays, but there are numerous surgical facilities now operating in Manitoba, the most recent being the Pan Am sports medicine facility, which treats a number of sports injuries through surgery on a day basis. But he admitted quite freely that there is nothing in that legislation that prohibits overnight stays.

Speaker's Ruling Question Period Practices

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm going to recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition for a question momentarily, but the tone is not good here. The tone is not good here. In fact, the intent in the questions and some of the responses would lead one to suggest that this is not a parliament, that this is something else. There are words that can be used in a context, and they have certain meanings, and they can convey certain things. The purpose of question period is to ascertain information with respect to government policy and matters of urgent business. And this place is called Alberta. It's not called Saskatchewan or British Columbia or Manitoba or something else.

There's also a time-honoured tradition in this House that if one hon. member says something, we accept the word of the hon. member. Words like some of the ones that have been quoted here, leaning all the way from "misled" to "phony," are not words that basically should be found in the question period.

The purpose of this particular point of our routine is to ask about "matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer." This is not part of the debate. We started the debate on a certain health bill yesterday, which I think is the background for much of this, and far as I can see in the Orders of the Day, it's scheduled for later today and tomorrow as well.

MR. DICKSON: Policy.

THE SPEAKER: Why don't we listen for a moment. Why don't we listen for a moment, hon. Official Opposition House Leader, to what's being said.

We'll deal with each question as it comes up, but there will be interjections from the chair unless the tone is improved dramatically. We deal with what the whole purpose of the question period is supposed to be. This is not part of the debate.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since the Premier claims that he's not proposing private hospitals, then why do his focus group documents – remember those focus group documents we talked about about two months ago? Why do those focus group documents with the blanked out pages say that the focus groups were convened for the purpose of discussing the proposed policy statement on the future role of private hospitals in Alberta? Why is that?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, the focus group participants were guaranteed anonymity in return for their participation. This is not uncommon. Well, I don't know but I would think that the Liberals would hold focus groups from time to time, convene focus groups, and would respect and guarantee the anonymity of those participants. We would do the same thing.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, if Albertans are to trust this Premier, then will he now show Albertans just exactly what's in these 30 hidden pages and the report that he's been hiding from Albertans on his private hospital policy for the last two months? Will he just show them, let it out? He can cover up the names.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, FOIP in terms of legislative law is very, very new, and there are some people who handle FOIP requests properly. I'll commit to this today: to provide without the names, if the hon. House leader will submit, the comments that were offered by the focus groups if I could have an undertaking on the part of the Liberal Party that they will share with us all of the focus group results and so on.

MRS. MacBETH: Absolutely.

MR. KLEIN: Fine. We'll do that. No problem. Okay. Without the names.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the government's attempts to put the best possible spin on its morally bankrupt private, for-profit hospital scheme, Albertans are not being fooled. Earlier today I delivered thousands of postcards from angry Albertans, many of them Conservative supporters who are breaking ranks with the government on this issue. Much of the opposition comes from the government's own Calgary backyard. My questions are to the Premier. What does the Premier say to R.W. White of Calgary, who writes: I have supported Mr. Klein since he first ran for mayor of Calgary, but this action is the last straw; no more, Mr. Klein?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the only answer to that question is purely political. I've been in this game now for 20 years, and I get letters like this day in and day out. If I went into my shell and if I buried my head in the sand and if I ran away because every person who wrote me a letter said, "I voted for you as the mayor, I voted for you as the MLA, but I'll never vote for you again," you know what? I wouldn't be standing here today. You fight for what you think is right.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is obviously

abandoning his own supporters. What does the Premier say to Thomas Clausen, also of Calgary, who writes: I have been a PC supporter since Peter Lougheed and a strong supporter of Ralph Klein; I suggest a plebiscite on this issue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there will be a plebiscite on this issue and every other issue facing this province in the challenges of the future. That plebiscite is called an election. There will be an election, and we will fight that election, and I welcome the participation.

We will fight the election not just on Bill 11 but on a government that has done a \$30 billion turnaround, a government that is the envy of the world, not only of the country but of the world, Mr. Speaker, a government that cares about health care, a government that cares about education, a government that cares about agriculture, a government that cares about preserving and protecting our energy industry, a government that is concerned about protecting our environment, a government that wants to build sensible and strong infrastructure, a government that wants to have safe and secure streets and good justice. That's what the election is all about.

Mr. Speaker, we are a party of all things to all people. We are not a one-trick pony.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans accept the Premier's challenge so long as he calls the election before he wrecks their medicare system.

My last question to the Premier . . .

MR. KLEIN: Well, with all due respect to the . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I listened very attentively to the questions.

MRS. SOETAERT: It wasn't a question.

THE SPEAKER: You can't have a preamble, so it must have been the question.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the election will be held in due course. I would remind the hon. member and the leader of the third party that we're only entering the third year of our mandate. There are so many challenges for this government as we enter the new millennium. One of them, of course, is Bill 11. You know, when that bill is done and it's passed, believe it or not, people will look out the windows, and they will still see the building standing. People will be going to their workplaces, people will be going to their hockey rinks and their community halls and their golf courses and their workout places, and the world will not have collapsed. As a matter of fact, hopefully they'll be going to their workplaces in their communities and their churches and so on, and they'll say: hey, this is still a very, very good province.

You know, if there's one thing that makes me so proud to be an Albertan, it's people from this province who travel elsewhere, including Liberals, by the way, because I've heard of them boasting about Alberta and the Alberta advantage and how good it is here. It is so good to hear people who travel not only to other parts of Canada but to other parts of the world who come back and say: you know, in Germany, in the Czech Republic, in the Slovak Republic, in Uganda, in South Africa, in Uruguay they know about Alberta, and they know about the success of this province. They come back and say: do I ever feel proud being an Albertan.

The only people who don't feel proud about being Albertans are the Liberals. The NDs do. The hon. leader does. He's consistent, and he feels proud. These people over here don't feel proud at all,

but most Albertans feel proud about their province and what we have accomplished, what we have accomplished as a team, a wonderful team. They feel proud. There's a sense of pride.

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

2:30

Gasoline Taxes

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of rhetoric but little action coming out of the federal Liberal government about lowering the price of fuel at the pumps. The federal Finance minister was recently quoted in the media as saying that he was willing to lower the federal taxes – and I stress “taxes,” because the federal government has both an excise tax and the GST applied per litre – if the provinces would lower their fuel tax. My question to the Acting Provincial Treasurer is: what is Alberta's response to the challenge from the federal government?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, a bit of a lead in to that is that the federal government has 10 cents a litre on the price of the fuel, and we have 9 cents as a gasoline tax plus the GST. The other day the hon. Stockwell Day, the Treasurer sent a letter to – he was Treasurer when this letter was written – Mr. Paul Martin recommending that he look at the GST as it was a tax upon a tax and that perhaps they could do something with that. Following that up, Mr. Martin made an offer to the provinces that he would consider looking at movement on the taxes if there were offers coming from the province.

So I sent a letter yesterday to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Paul Martin, and I asked him:

Please advise me of the rate reduction you would consider and the anticipated duration of the reduction. I would . . . like to know the extent of the provincial participation you would expect, including the size of provincial tax cuts and whether other provinces must agree to take part before federal fuel taxes will be reduced.

I asked him to meet with me as soon as possible if he would like to discuss that. In that letter and following that I make the statement: whatever that decision is, it's your move, Mr. Martin.

MR. HLADY: My supplemental to the same minister: what would be the budgetary impact to Alberta if Alberta decided to lower our tax and over what period of time?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, if we lower by 1 cent the 9 cents we have on, it would be approximately \$60 million, so if the 9 cents were removed in total that would equate to \$540 million. Mr. Martin phoned me yesterday after this took place, and I said to him: you have about \$500 million coming out of Alberta in your 10 cents, and we have roughly \$540 million; what would you be willing to lower on a matching basis? He said that he wouldn't make that commitment and that he would have to talk to the other provinces but that he would get back to me on it.

What it means budgetwise is that we would – say it was 3 cents over a six-month period; we'd probably be looking at about \$90 million.

I make an emphasis here, a very strong emphasis, that this money goes into roads and infrastructure. We're spending this year \$1.2 billion on infrastructure. The \$540 million we take out of the 9 cents plus about \$190 million on licence plates and registrations does not come close to what we're spending. In fact, it's a little over 50 percent of it. So we could not sustain this if the price of oil goes down. It's \$25.23. We could not sustain forever taking out the 9 cents, because I don't think the people of Alberta want their roads to deteriorate.

Mr. Martin, on the other hand, could take this out for a period of

time and not affect his road budget. You know why? Because out of the \$5 billion that they collect across Canada in that excise tax, the gasoline tax, they only return \$221 million a year to the 10 provinces and two territories.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting that in other provinces surgical facilities that allow overnight stays are called hospitals, but in Alberta they're called accredited surgical facilities. While other provinces like Ontario are clamping down on these facilities because they know how much they threaten medicare, this government's policy is moving in the opposite direction. On March 3 the Ontario government announced that it's closing two private hospitals "as part of its ongoing efforts to protect Ontario's public health care system." My questions are to the Minister of Health. Why does this government want surgical facilities to provide overnight stays when other provinces have realized how much this threatens medicare and are taking steps to protect the public system?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information that I've received, comments from individuals at the recent health ministers' meeting in Ontario, would indicate that in Ontario, as has been accurately reported, they do have an Independent Health Facilities Act, and they also have another piece of legislation that fits with it called the Private Hospitals Act, which regulates insured services in private hospitals. So they have passed that legislation, and as was pointed out earlier, it was done by a Liberal government. As far as I know, there are no plans to repeal that legislation, at least as of approximately a week ago there weren't.

The point that we are making is that for years in Ontario – and I won't go through the list of all the other provinces unless they want to question those too – these hospitals or clinics or centres have been providing surgical services. They are private operations. They've been under contract arrangements with the Ontario government, and at least in the case of the Shouldice clinic they've done a very, very substantial business with uninsured persons, particularly our neighbours to the south, the Americans.

We are first of all apprized that these clinics have provided good service, quality service. It has worked well within the Ontario system. That is the point that we've made all along with respect to our particular policy. It is more protective, more restrictive than these other pieces of legislation, and we have to raise the question as to why there is concern from across the way and why there is some reticence on the part of the federal government, although I would like to emphasize that the Prime Minister has said in conversation with the Premier that we should go ahead and pass Bill 11.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, given that this government knows very well that private hospitals in Ontario are grandfathered from prior to medicare, why don't they just stop misleading Albertans by using Ontario examples to bolster their weak argument? They don't apply, and he knows it.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be – I would have to verify this – that there is some discussion of some kind going on in Ontario at this particular point in time. This was not just solely a matter of grandfathering. If it was grandfathering, why did the

Ontario government – it's a rhetorical question, I know. If this was the case, why did the government of Ontario go to the very extensive effort to pass two pieces of legislation, one called the Independent Health Facilities Act, which provides for the approval of these facilities, and also, fitting with it, the Private Hospitals Act, which regulates insured services in private hospitals? Why would they do that if they didn't feel it was acceptable and worked well for them?

MS BLAKEMAN: Why won't this government just admit that when a person walks into a private hospital in Ontario or an accredited surgical facility in Alberta, they'll be walking into the same kind of place? They're both private hospitals. He knows it. The government knows it. The focus groups knew it. That's why they blanked out the pages; isn't it? Admit it.

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I reported the titles that the Ontario government has used for their surgical clinics. I think if you looked at the types of services that these specialized hospitals provide, they may use the other term, but in fact our term "surgical clinic" is much more accurate. For instance, the most famous in Ontario of these private facilities is the Shouldice hospital, which does only one highly specialized procedure, and that is hernia operations. They do it very well. They do it very efficiently.

We're debating over names, Mr. Speaker. If you go to the Cambie clinic in British Columbia, there they refer to it as a surgical clinic, and it covers quite a wide range of specialized services. Again, it is highly regarded in terms of its quality and its provision of services.

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

Apollo Gas Inc.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Government Services. Last week we heard that Government Services would not renew Apollo Gas Inc.'s licence to market natural gas to Alberta effective April 1, 2000. I understand that 64,000 Albertans, including a number of St. Albertans, have signed contracts with this company for the provision of natural gas. Can the minister explain why the decision was ultimately made?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have in the province of Alberta a code of conduct that we expect to be followed by companies operating or licensed in this province, and we don't look at that very lightly. We take it quite seriously. We work with companies to make sure that they in fact operate within those parameters, and when we do have difficulties, then we usually work very closely with the company to try and bring them onside and to bring them in line with accepted practices within the province.

In this particular case we've worked for well over a year trying to bring this group into that framework. We were not successful. We had issued some warnings and some suspensions, and quite frankly there's only so long you can go. I relate it to almost a ball game: three strikes and then that's it.

Now, insofar as the 64,000 Albertans who have contracts with this group, we are working with the company to make sure that their service is not interrupted. There are options where their contracts can revert back to the original utility company, but they will be looked after. There is a process in place to help ensure that customers are looked after.

I have to stress that our rules are very tough, but they're very fair, and if you follow them, there's no problem. If you don't, then we

have to come down hard on companies that do not work within those parameters that we've laid out.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. While I understand that Apollo Gas may appeal the decision, can the minister explain the status of my constituents' contracts with Apollo Gas today and during the possible appeal process?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I have received a request for an appeal on this. Under the Fair Trading Act I am obligated as minister to put together within 30 days a review panel that will look at the application for appeal from the company, and they will proceed on with that. Separate and apart and in the meantime, we will ensure that the 64,000 customers are, in fact, dealt with to ensure that there's no interruption in their delivery of service, and that will proceed on.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Can we expect the same concerns with the anticipated deregulation of the electrical industry later this year?

DR. WEST: No, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is that the reason for that is because the Minister of Government Services has been working diligently with the Department of Resource Development on this. I'll have her supplement this answer, but I think it's noteworthy to say that the issue around Apollo or any other marketer that has come forward and been in that gray area about marketing contracts has been good for electrical deregulation because now there is a good focus by Albertans on this issue. The Minister of Government Services is taking due diligence in looking at good rules, and I'll have her answer around that.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, just to supplement. We've had the benefit of working in a deregulated environment with natural gas. That has been a good guideline to show us where there are some potential loopholes that are being tightened up right now, and they will be fed into the electrical direct marketing concept and regulations. As I said before, our regulations are tough, but they're fair, and if you operate within the code of conduct within those regulations, we welcome you to Alberta. If you don't, we don't want you here. It's very straightforward. Consumer protection is critically important.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government claims that it conducted this review of the private provision of medical and hospital services in other jurisdictions to see how other provinces protect their health care systems. Now, the document reports that B.C. "prohibits practitioners or facilities from charging fees beyond those in the fee schedule for insured services." My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why won't the Alberta government follow the British Columbia example and have a policy prohibiting fees for enhanced services? After all, if these services are necessary, then they should be covered.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do in Alberta exactly what British

Columbia does, and that is we negotiate an overall agreement, an overall fee schedule with our physicians in this province: Alberta Health and Wellness on behalf of the government and the people of the province, and the Alberta Medical Association on behalf of physicians. A fee schedule is arrived at. This fee schedule governs the provision of payment to doctors for insured services. That's the way they are reimbursed today, and that is the way they'll be reimbursed under the provisions of Bill 11. That is very much, I think, in keeping with what is being done in British Columbia.

MRS. SOETAERT: My second question. Why does the Alberta government allow wealthy Albertans to jump the queue by paying for diagnostic services like MRIs when in Saskatchewan private health facilities are prohibited from charging for diagnostics so that people cannot jump the queue?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, that particular question is now being posed for the third or fourth time. It was initially raised as a good question by a member of the government caucus. The interpretation under the Canada Health Act of the provision of MRI services is that it is not in the category of being a mandated insured service under the Canada Health Act. There are, I believe, two provinces besides ourselves that have MRI clinics operating in the private sector. I acknowledge that in Saskatchewan, for instance, they have, as far as their government is concerned, declared it an insured service. Certainly that is something to be reviewed. I would acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker, the other point here, though, I think is very important, and that is the very considerable effort that government is making and will continue to make to expand the capacity in the province for MRI scans. I have alluded to it before, but I think it should be repeated, and that is that just in these past number of months we have approved and expanded the MRI capacity of MRI services in this province paid for by the public health care system to Lethbridge, to Red Deer, soon to Mistahia or to Grande Prairie. Approval has been given as far as Medicine Hat is concerned. So there is recognition of the need for additional MRI capacity in this province which will be paid for out of the public health care system, and we are following up on that.

2:50

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the minister: if MRIs then are needed for all medical diagnoses, will you not put that under the public system, put all MRIs under the public system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure of the question. As I understand the question, it was: if they are needed for all medical diagnoses. Well, it is a very state-of-the-art diagnostic tool. As I've said, we have dramatically increased the capacity for paid-for MRI services in this province through our health authorities, concentrated, yes, in Edmonton and Calgary but also in the regional hospitals that I've mentioned. We are certainly cognizant of the importance of this particular diagnostic tool, and we want to have the expansion of its availability on a paid-for basis to Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Sarcee Trail Extension

MS GRAHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Infrastructure. On Monday of this week the council of the city of Calgary voted to sign the memorandum of understanding which would permit negotiations to

now begin on the 37th Street extension to Sarcee Trail through the Tsuu T'ina Nation. My constituents in Calgary-Lougheed, which is very traffic congested, are very interested to know what's going to happen next. Can the Minister of Infrastructure tell us what the next steps are in this process?

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary has approved the memorandum of understanding with amendments. The city will forward these amendments to the Tsuu T'ina Nation and also to our department for further review. Once we have looked at the amendments, the three parties to the MOU will then meet to discuss the amendments and to decide on the process for signing the memorandum of understanding.

This MOU is an agreement to negotiate, so once the province and the Tsuu T'ina Nation have joined the city of Calgary in signing the MOU, that's when negotiations can begin. We will be negotiating all parts of the project including, as well, who will finance the necessary planning studies. The time lines, though, for this project are part of the negotiation.

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the same minister. Now that the city has ratified the memorandum of understanding, does the minister know of any reason why the province won't sign on to the agreement straightaway?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we haven't officially received the amendments, but I don't know why we wouldn't sign the memorandum of understanding if we receive agreement from the Tsuu T'ina Nation on the amendments. I'd like to make it clear that we recognize the importance of protecting the environment, the ecological resources, the historical and archeological sites that are in that area, and we have written this into the MOU. We are committed, of course, to a consultative process that includes Calgarians, the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and of course all Albertans. Four open houses were held in Calgary to discuss the details of the MOU. The process for further consultation will be defined in the next set of negotiations.

Now, signing the MOU will definitely set the principles and values which guide the next set of negotiations. However, I want to be clear that it does not commit us or anyone to the project. The process will be open and transparent. The city once again plans to consult with its residents before any further decisions are made after the signing of the MOU.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question then. It's my understanding that the due date for the finalization of the negotiations is in fact October 31 of this year. Is that going to stand, or will that have to be changed? Does the minister know?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, that's one area that's still open to negotiation. I can't say for sure that if we don't reach an understanding by that certain day, all parties just go back and not proceed further with negotiations, but that is a time line that's there. It's there at the request of the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and we respect that. I think it's a time line where it now gives us a date to work towards, and if we accomplish it, fine. If not, then at that time we'll again look at it and see if we can come to a common agreement on how we can proceed further.

Definitely the hon. member highlights an issue with respect to congested traffic. It's a major road going through the community. The city of Calgary has just issued to us the most recent updated census, and they're projecting a million people in the city of Calgary by the year 2007, so that's a huge, huge growth.

head: Recognitions

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

Hon. members, it's also the birthday of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie today.

Now we'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Douglas and Cherie Gillett

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to recognize Douglas and Cherie Gillett, who are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on Thursday, April 6, 2000. Douglas is a native Edmontonian born in Rosedale, and Cherie arrived in Edmonton at the age of six months. They have two children, Ken and Jane, and are the proud grandparents of three grandchildren. Both Doug and Cherie are very active in St. Luke's Church in Strathearn and are involved in the choir. They also operate a group called the Heart and Soul Singers, who perform at lodges and seniors' homes. They are both accomplished artists, and Doug gives art lessons in the community. The Sherard Musical Theatre is another project in which both Doug and Cherie actively participate. I wish them every happiness in their 50th year of marriage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

100th Anniversary of Cowley Mail Service

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If one goes into any village or hamlet in rural Alberta today and visits their post office, you get a unique opportunity to meet with grassroots Alberta. The village of Cowley celebrated 100 years of postal service to that community and surrounding district on Saturday, April 1, 2000, and that's 100 years to the day. Much is changed from the days when mail carriers would provide rural service by traveling from the main post office, like Cowley, to outlying posts and exchange incoming for outgoing mail. Today families come to the Cowley post office and appreciate and enjoy the traditional one-on-one service. I'd like to thank Marjorie Haugen for the invitation last Saturday to mix and mingle with these families and relive the history of their great community.

I'd also like to recognize former and present postmasters for providing continuous, reliable service to the residents of Cowley. They are: from 1900 to 1907, James E. Davidson; from 1907 to 1912, Donald R. McIvor; from 1912 to '52, Matthew A. Murphy; from '52 to '57, Marjorie Haugen; from '57 to '61, Edith Evans; from '61 to '83, Alice Sepeta; and from '84 to the present, Lucille Martin. Congratulations to them all on reaching this great milestone, on continuing tradition.

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

3:00

Edmonton West Raiders

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to recognize a group of dedicated coaches, parents, and soccer players: the under 13 girls' B division Edmonton West Raiders. On March 18 and 19 they obtained silver in the provincials in Calgary, and this team has a history of winning. Last year they won a bronze in Medicine Hat. These young girls have poured heart and soul into the game of soccer. They practised many hours every week in all types of weather to achieve the excellence they have. The support and dedication of the parents has also been essential to

the success of this team. Coach Paul Kuin and assistant coaches Tony Procacinni and Stuart Burritt also need to be recognized for their dedication and hard work.

On behalf of the Members of this Legislative Assembly I would like to extend congratulations to the Edmonton West Raiders. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Daysland Thunderstars

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to give recognition in this Assembly to a true triple crown winner, the Daysland peewee-A Thunderstars in the Wainwright constituency. This talented hockey team was truly magnificent throughout the 1999-2000 season as they first captured and won their zone and then the gold medal at the 2000 Winter Games in Sherwood Park. The second leg of the crown was the winning of the league championship after a hard-fought battle. The third and final leg of the triple crown was captured in Wainwright, March 24 to 26, at the provincial playoffs, where they defeated Beaumont in the second overtime period.

Congratulations to the players, coaches, managers, parents, and fans. They all played an important role in developing this super team of young men. Congratulations to the community of Daysland.

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

Tommy Douglas

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a remarkable Canadian and a former giant of Canadian politics, the late Tommy Douglas. All of my colleagues in the Assembly know that Tommy Douglas is the father of Canadian medicare. He fought tirelessly for his vision of medicare, and fortunately for us all he succeeded. His dream of universal medicare became reality, and it touches us all. Achieving his dream didn't just simply happen. Tommy Douglas worked ferociously; he never gave up.

Today Canadians and Albertans find his life and work incredibly inspiring. When asked why he stayed with the NDP when he could have done better with a more powerful party, Douglas replied:

I have watched politicians for the last forty years drop their principles in order to get power only to find that those who paid and controlled the party which they joined prevented them from doing all the things they really believed in.

Tommy Douglas believed. Tommy Douglas endured. We are forever indebted to Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World Figure Skating Championship

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise today to bring recognition to the three Alberta figure skaters who participated in the world figure skating championship in Nice, France. Many Albertans held their breath through triple axels, quadruple lutzes, and wonderfully choreographed performances of the young skaters who represented Canada at the 2000 World Figure Skating Championship. Alberta Games alumna Jamie Sale and David Pelletier, her partner, finished fourth in the pairs competition. Although Jamie now trains in Quebec, she still is an Albertan in our heart, and we will be closely watching her rising career. We shared the disappointment of Jamie and David in their fourth place finish after being touted for a medal in Paris. Well, Jamie and David, we are extremely proud of you.

Many will also remember Kristy Sargeant, from Alix, a Canadian champion and an Alberta Games alumna. Her pairs skating experience will continue to take her and her skating partner to new heights.

Mr. Speaker, these skaters demonstrated pride and excellence in their classes at the 2000 World Figure Skating Championship. This is the calibre of athletes that sustain Alberta's reputation for excellence in sports.

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

Sergeant James Brown

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Her Honour Lois Hole, at a recent investiture of the Royal Life Saving Society presented a rescue commendation to Sergeant James Brown of our Edmonton garrison. Sergeant Brown was one of six individuals awarded the rescue commendation. Sergeant Brown had been involved in search and rescue early in his military career, and over the last two years instructed in first aid.

In August of last year Sergeant Brown was enjoying a day at Allan Beach with his family when his attention was drawn to a woman screaming for help, as her husband had disappeared into the water while sailboarding. Sergeant Brown without hesitation dove into the water and pulled the man from entangling weeds. Upon reaching the shore, he performed CPR for 40 minutes until STARS air ambulance arrived. Unfortunately, the 36-year-old father passed away shortly after midnight that day.

Sergeant Brown credits his St. John Ambulance training to enable him to react in an emergency situation and believes that everyone should have that excellent training.

I would like this Legislature to recognize the brave efforts by Sergeant James Brown.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Televised Second Reading Debate

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, last evening during the special debate that all hon. members agreed to the rules for, there was notification of a number of points of order, but I'm pleased to advise that today I've been notified that in fact there are no points of order arising out of the session last evening, so that's very, very positive.

The chair would also like to recognize and basically thank the vast majority of members yesterday for abiding by the rules that people agreed to. I know that some members sent me personal notes as the evening wore on about how difficult it was. I received these notes from all quarters of the House but for the most part would like to recognize that it basically means there could be a model that could be used.

The chair also recognizes that at a certain point last evening one could almost take out the Sergeant-at-Arms' sword and cut through the tension that was in the air and the desire that various members really had to do more than simply look at one another with a smile. Presumably that sort of attitude basically carried over to the early part of the question period today, and I guess that type of exuberance is all part of the human spirit. Nevertheless, there are two points of order that we have to deal with today. Again, I hope I'm not providing a personal view with respect to it. Perhaps it's an extension of what didn't occur last night, and because it couldn't occur last night, it occurred today in the question period. That's probably the reason we have these two points of order, but once again, I guess I'm not supposed to do that.

First of all, we'll deal with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order**Factual Accuracy**

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This arises from the first set of questions from the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier. The authority would be *Beauchesne* 408(2), and I'd suggest that that authority was offended in two ways.

The first way was that the Premier said that the Liberals are not FOIPable and went on to complain that the Liberals had in effect concealed information, had not shared information to inform Albertans as to the cost of their campaign. In response to that, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier had been paying close attention, he would in fact have heard the tabling, but mere moments before, of documents establishing that the cost of the Liberal opposition advertising was \$17,064.68. He would have heard me undertake that there were some minor consequential costs for a couple of room rentals that I'd be tabling as soon as I had them. So in fact the information had been provided from the Liberal opposition in response to the queries from the Premier both last night and then again this morning.

The second respect in which 408(2) would be offended would be this. When the Premier singles out and suggests that the Liberals are not FOIPable, that's actually an inflammatory exaggeration of the facts. The facts are that it's been the Liberal opposition that has pressed to make amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, most recently in the three-year statutorily mandated review of the FOIP act. It in fact has been government members that have uniformly and consistently resisted all such efforts to allow for fuller disclosure.

So on those two counts I think 408(2) was offended. Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's really much to say on this. I think the hon. member was trying to clarify the fact that he'd made a tabling and perhaps it was missed in the din and hue of the afternoon and wanted to re-emphasize what was in it. That's simply a clarification and nothing more.

As respects the various representations he makes before committees with respect to the FOIP act, they speak for themselves. I don't think we're in a position this afternoon in the House to get into debate on what he's put forward with respect to the FOIP act, but if he's suggesting that we should have FOIP applied to private members and their business in the House and those sorts of things, well, it's not even worth going there. It's a matter of clarification. It's not a point of order.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Two brief comments with respect to this. I do believe that there was some degree of exuberance with respect to this, and the word "inflammatory" was used. In my recollection of the first 20 or 25 minutes of the question period today there was a fair amount of inflammatory activity going on both in responses and in preambles to questions that we all could have done better with. Again, let's be careful with these preambles. They're getting us into a great deal of responses that only lead to the heightening of tension in here and basically violate I think what's the best in us.

Government House Leader, you have a point of order?

Point of Order**Preambles**

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You just dealt with it. I was rising with respect to the Leader of the Opposition, specifically with respect to her second supplementary to her first question, when she engaged in what I thought was a rather lengthy, unnecessary, inflammatory, inappropriate, and misrepresenting preamble, which then begged responses which would correct the misapprehension that

people might have if they believed the assertions which were being made in the preamble. But you've dealt with that, I think, today and I think should continue to do so.

The only thing I'd add to that, Mr. Speaker, is that in dealing with that type of question earlier on, you indicated that the House leaders should keep their caucuses in order. I would also ask that you intercede on a more regular basis when these unnecessary and inappropriate preambles are being put forward and also would like to indicate that I appreciated the fact that you interceded when such a preamble in the form of a question was put forward by the leader of the third party.

MR. DICKSON: I was almost going to associate myself with the comments of the Government House Leader until he made the last observation. I'm not so sure, Mr. Speaker, that I'd encourage you to participate to a greater extent in question period. I think you've used wisely your discretion to intervene sparingly. I think we're dealing with a hugely important issue, and as you yourself recognized, there's always an emotional component when people feel strongly about an issue important to their constituents. Obviously, we all have to do a better job on both sides of the House in terms of asserting and exerting self-discipline and trying to find a measure of restraint, notwithstanding the passion of our convictions.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, both hon. leaders, for your comments with respect to this. I just want to repeat once again what the philosophy is that I use with respect to this. This is the highest court in the province of Alberta. The honourable people who are here have earned the right to be here. They have earned the right to participate. They have earned the right to represent their constituents. They have earned the right to rise and be recognized. They have earned the right to rise and be recognized and respond to the question as much as the question is given, and they're all honourable people.

This is called question period, and the purpose of question period is to bring everyone accountable on both sides. The last thing in the world that this particular individual wants to do is interject every 30 seconds or every minute. He can do that, and in fact there are Speakers across the country who do that. There was recently one, a very good friend of mine in Ontario, who is no longer the Speaker, not for these reasons. He used to take it upon himself to interject every minute, and he didn't think it was a good day unless he threw out at least six members every day. That was his objective. He was going to throw out six members every day, and that was his quota. It was absolutely chaotic.

Now, that is not the philosophy of this Speaker. This is not his philosophy. He thinks the hon. members are honourable and that the hon. members should have the right to ask questions and also another hon. member respond. On the one hand, if the need is that we should interject every 30 seconds, this will no longer be a question period. It will be simply known as Mr. Speaker's interjection period. That's the way that would be.

So the discipline is on everybody. I have no difficulty doing the interjections, but I think that a little more brevity and clarity with respect to the question and a little more brevity and clarity with respect to the response would help us all.

Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure on behalf of the Deputy Government House Leader to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 7, 8, and 10.

[Motion carried]

Contaminated Sites

Q7. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

What was the total number of contaminated sites recorded by Alberta Environment on December 31, 1999, how many of these were underground petroleum storage sites, how many of the remaining sites were classified as severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated, how many were unclassified, and how many in each category had been visited and reviewed between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 1999?

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

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The motion is very straightforward, and I think it describes what is a perfect subject for a written question. It asks for statistical information, detailed information, very, very specific information, and of course taken in its totality, it would give Albertans a picture of how many contaminated sites there are around the province in several different categories. Any lesser information would not represent disclosure and would not represent, I think, goodwill. So we are hoping that the government will help us communicate with Albertans regarding a number of contaminated sites, particularly on how Alberta Environment has treated these sites and how many of them, as I say, are represented in each category and whether or not they've been reviewed in the last calendar year. I look forward to the government's affirmative response to Written Question 7.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, but I would like to suggest some amendments to Question 7, that it be amended by adding the word "approximate" before the expression "total number"; by striking out the expression "how many of the remaining sites were classified as severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated, how many were unclassified"; and finally, by striking out the expression "in each category." Accordingly, the amended question would read as follows:

What was the approximate total number of contaminated sites recorded by Alberta Environment on December 31, 1999, how many of these were underground petroleum storage sites, and how many had been visited and reviewed between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 1999?

Mr. Speaker, my department is developing a database of all contaminated sites, but it is not yet complete. Accordingly, I would only be able to provide an approximate list of these sites.

Finally, the reference to sites as being "severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated" bears no resemblance to the manner in which these sites are classified. Sites are not classified by the degree of contamination but are classified according to the nature of the contaminant. Accordingly, my response would clarify this for the benefit of the member asking the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the amendment?

MR. DICKSON: Yes, on the amendment. I was listening carefully, because when I saw the amendment – and I'm not sure why the department is not able to tell us the total number of contaminated sites. If the minister gave an explanation for that, I'm sorry; I didn't hear it. I heard his explanation in terms of the classification system. I would think that notwithstanding all the cutbacks we've seen in staff at Alberta Environment, this would be an important number to track and that the number would be available. As I say, I didn't hear an explanation in terms of why that information isn't available.

3:20

On the other part of the amendment, "how many of the remaining sites were classified as severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated." The minister says that they use a different classification system, that this doesn't accurately reflect the departmental way of classifying them, but I note that in the amendment he doesn't propose to provide information that reflects that. It may be that the department has 40 different variables. I mean, I don't know whether it's that complex. I understand him to say that it's a different sort of measuring stick, a different sort of valuation, and that's fair, but I'm not sure we've heard a reason why we wouldn't be able to see that information, to know how many were severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated. This minister in particular is certainly creative enough, I would have thought, to find a way to be able to provide that information.

The purpose clearly is because Albertans value the quality of their environment. I think they want to know and are entitled to know with some specificity the extent of the problem, and that, I think, is the import of the question. To have it come back in the form that's proposed as amended, there's no gradation, no sort of qualitative assessment as to how big the problem is. I mean, to know, whether it's approximate or absolute, "the total number of contaminated sites," I would think is not so much useful information as having some sense of what the range of the problem is. [interjection] It may be that the Acting Treasurer wants to get involved in this too, but as I understand it, we're trying to quantify the extent of and seriousness of the contamination.

Although the minister will certainly give us some information with the amendment, his amendment doesn't address the degree of contamination. I think that is implicit in here. That's a key part of what my colleague is trying to find out. I think it's a key element that Albertans would want to know, and I don't understand why you don't have that information. As I say, maybe it takes a little more work on the part of the minister. Maybe the grading system is just so complex, there'd be no way to do that in a manageable way, but I didn't hear the minister say that. Maybe that's the case, but I didn't hear him make that assertion. So that's the comment with respect to this.

"How many were unclassified" is the other element that would be dropped with this amendment. Once again, you know, the job of opposition is, frankly, to keep government on its toes and keep ministers on their toes. If in fact there would be a significant number of contaminated sites that weren't classified, there are some things that flow from that. We would hope, I guess, that that number of unclassified contaminated sites would be a small number, because that would suggest that there's some work that had not been done and ought to have been done. So I think that would be useful to have.

I don't know how the site visits work. What we're still left with is: how many had been visited and reviewed in that time period? There's an issue of the visit, the review, and presumably that's sort of a necessary precedent to the classification. In the minister's very skeletal, very brief submission we didn't hear those particulars, Mr. Speaker.

So those are the problems that I have with the amendment. This minister, I'd just add, usually distinguishes himself in the House by trying to go the extra mile to accommodate opposition requests for information. I'm assuming that he probably may think he has some good reasons for not providing the other information, but I didn't hear with the kind of fullness and the kind of detail that I'd hoped to hear, Mr. Speaker, why that information wouldn't be proffered to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the amendment.

MR. GIBBONS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stand looking at the amendment and talking about it, I've got concerns around "approximate" and "in each category." The main thing is that other contaminated sites around the province are a major issue. We have talked with many people and organizations throughout the province who want to know the status of these. I do understand, by visiting with municipalities throughout the province, that when you have underground areas where you've got ex filling stations and so on and the cleanup and that they want to do something with this, this is something that we have to really look at. There are major contamination problems throughout the province.

What are municipalities supposed to do when the owners have closed their businesses and, with no fault, have moved away or gone into bankruptcy? This is a cost that goes back on them. Now, we've asked these questions on a major issue, asking how many there were, but we're getting the amendment back that actually stresses an approximate number. If you'd actually even change "approximate" to 99 percent of them or something like that, because approximate could be 50 percent out there in the province while the actual fact is there are maybe a thousand sites that we have to look at. Striking out "how many" is the same type of variation.

With a classification of severity, we're talking anywhere from the Bovar site down to gas stations and other types of contaminated areas: sloughs, problems with spraying throughout the province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thanks very much. I won't repeat the observations made by my colleagues. I'll simply add a note of disappointment in that I'm surprised to hear that the minister would not be collecting information that would distinguish between severely versus lightly contaminated sites. Clearly there's a range of sites and remediation for these sites. The amount of concern that nearby residents would have would be affected not only by what has contaminated the site but also by how badly contaminated that site is. At the very least I would have hoped that the minister would give us this alternate scheme for classifying contaminated sites and may take under advisement the suggestion that some scale be applied to the degree of contamination in reporting to Albertans.

The one comment that I don't believe I heard my colleagues make reference to was the use of the word "approximate." Again I'm a little bit concerned. When the minister says that there's this alternate scheme which lists sites by what has contaminated them, it would lead me to conclude that there would be a count, that there'd be a tally at the end of that classification. By using the word "approximate," it suggests that the minister in fact doesn't have that information and that we could get back a response to this amended motion that would say that there may be approximately 100 sites or

200 sites or 1,000 sites, and we wouldn't really know what that meant. We wouldn't have any confidence that we actually would know how many actual sites there were and which sites would pose a health or an environmental concern.

It's not too late for this minister to rethink this amendment, and it's not of course beyond expectation that the House may not accept this amendment. Then we'd be able to revert to the original motion as proposed by my colleague, which would provide a much better quality of information and would provide a higher degree of certainty as to what it is that Albertans are dealing with. So I would ask the minister to rethink the amendment, but in the absence of that sober second thought, I would ask my colleagues in the Assembly to not accept the amendment so that we can proceed to a vote on the motion as it was originally proposed.

[Motion on amendment carried]

3:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I suppose reasonable argument doesn't always carry the day.

MR. HANCOCK: The vote was unanimous.

MR. SAPERS: Was it a recorded vote, Government House Leader? Okay. We'll debate through the chair, obviously, Mr. Speaker, but I can't account for the lack of hearing on the part of the government. Maybe that also accounts for why they didn't accept my reasonable arguments to defeat the amendment.

In any case, I accept the minister at his word, and I hope that he will provide the highest quality and the most complete information that his department can assemble. If he can give us an actual number instead of an approximate number, I think the Official Opposition and all Albertans would appreciate that. If he can provide us with this alternate classification scheme in his answer, even though the amended motion doesn't require it, I think we would all appreciate that.

Certainly I would appreciate the minister providing a response to my colleague who is the Official Opposition critic for matters regarding the environment as to our suggestion that he begin to classify contaminated sites according to their degree of contamination, particularly with reference to those that are severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated.

While we will get some information, I'm concerned that it won't be the quality of information that was originally sought, but I do hope that the minister will do what he can to still make this a worthwhile process by ensuring that the information that is received is as complete as possible and takes into consideration the nature of the discussion we've had on Written Question 7.

[Written Question 7 as amended carried]

Trade Offices

Q8. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that the following question be accepted.

What are the estimated costs of operating Alberta's trade offices and engaging trade consultants under contract abroad for the fiscal year 1998-99 broken down by accommodation costs and salary ranges for consultants, clerical staff, commercial officers, and posted staff?

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware that the department does a review of foreign offices. There is some information that is available, but the information does not satisfy the natural curiosity of taxpayers when it comes to how their money is used supporting these foreign offices.

Keep in mind that it was just a little bit earlier on, actually late in the year 1999, that there was some government speculation that there was going to be an expansion of trade offices and a reopening and restaffing of trade offices. I think Albertans made it very clear that no such activity should be undertaken before there was a good understanding of the outcomes and the benefits of such an initiative. I think Albertans are very cost conscious when it comes to this kind of government program and want to make sure that there is value for each and every dollar spent when it comes to staffing and operating Alberta's trade offices and engaging in trade consultations on a worldwide basis.

Now, the Official Opposition is certainly not saying that Alberta should stop participating in these international activities. We believe very strongly that Alberta's future in part depends on our ability to have our products and services sought after in the global marketplace. We certainly support the joint federal/provincial trade missions and encourage Alberta business to get on board and tell the world about good-news stories that are born right here in Alberta, but what we would like to see as well is the highest level of accountability for tax dollars spent when it comes to promoting Alberta business. There's a fine line to be walked between government policy which supports, promotes, and enhances business opportunities on a worldwide basis and government policy which actually provides a direct subsidy to a select handful of Alberta enterprises.

This is a government that has said that it's out of the business of being in business. This is a government that has said that it no longer wants to pick winners and losers in the marketplace. I think that we'd like to hold them to those commitments, and we can do so by ensuring some transparency in the accounting for how Alberta trade offices and trade consultation initiatives are contracted for and what their cost estimates are and by providing the information on how much money is paid to each and every one of the men and women that are engaged on behalf of the province of Alberta to participate in these trade initiatives.

I hope that the Assembly will find favour with Written Question 8, and I would seek its speedy acceptance.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I would move to amend Written Question 8 by striking out the word "estimated" and substituting the word "actual" and by striking out the expression "accommodation costs and salary ranges for consultants, clerical staff, commercial officers, and posted staff" and substituting the expression "posted staffing costs, locally engaged administrative and clerical staffing costs, accommodation and operating costs, and what was the salary range for posted staff?" The written question would then read:

What are the actual costs of operating Alberta's trade offices and engaging trade consultants under contract abroad for the fiscal year 1998-99 broken down by posted staffing costs, locally engaged administrative and clerical staffing costs, accommodation and operating costs, and what was the salary range for posted staff?

Salary ranges for consultants, commercial officers, and locally engaged clerical staff vary based on the type of service, length of term, and the local labour markets. There is no standard range. The actual figures are published in the annual report. This is a more accurate reflection than the estimate requested by the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the amendment.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Just to speak a bit on the amendment. The amendment, of course, does provide a shot at the information that was requested in the original motion. These types of trade consultants and facilities and such have always come under question by the public, and that's why it becomes so important to have all that information disclosed. Even with the information fully disclosed, there is still some question as to whether the benefits of spending those dollars by having those types of facilities and consultants is a worthwhile investment.

Then the question comes into play on the appointment of the trade commissioners, or the expression that's used when they go to places like London, for example. London is a classic example. I can recall a former minister of a Conservative government being posted over in London. Possibly the person was very, very qualified; I don't know. Then, on the other hand, it is a bit of a coincidence that she did happen to be a member of Executive Council, of the government side. Upon my retirement I don't expect that the government is going to be sending me over to Finland to run a trade office over there.

Mr. Speaker, on the federal level we see the same concern being expressed by the public. We have the recent example of a person with probably one of the shortest if not the shortest reigns of any Prime Minister being shipped off to Los Angeles with a surprisingly big budget. I'm not sure exactly what that person does in Los Angeles other than entertain and socialize and such. Those are the types of instances that cause the public to question the costs that are associated with these types of expenditures, these types of facilities, these types of consultants, and as to whether this money could be put to better use.

3:40

Another question that is probably in order to be responded to at a later date is a question along the lines of trying to get some tangible indication of return on that expenditure. In other words, if the operation in London is going to cost \$1.5 million a year to operate, what economic benefit is it to Canada? Is it increasing the economic benefit by a multiple of 10, in other words tenfold, or is it actually a minus situation?

I commend the minister that he has gone some distance here to make the question acceptable by incorporating his amendment, which I'm speaking to, and on that basis it softens the blow somewhat. I thank the minister for that.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not talking about small potatoes here when we're talking about Alberta trade and the international community. I think it's worth while reviewing for just a moment the nature of that trade. With the United States of America, that my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford was just speaking of, I believe our local agent is actually posted now in Portland but probably does a high degree of business in California as well. I notice that trade exports to the United States last year from Alberta equaled something in the order of \$25 billion, and manufactured exports to the U.S. were about \$7.8 billion.

In Japan there is one Albertan locally posted in Tokyo and nine locally engaged representatives maintaining a full-service office.

Total exports to Japan from Alberta are \$1.3 billion, and manufactured exports are just shy of \$800 million, soon to be a billion dollars.

When it comes to China, there is a newly assigned collocation agreement with the Canadian embassy. We had some representatives from the People's Republic here with us today in the Assembly. It's our fourth largest trading partner actually, totaling about \$400 million in exports and \$250 million, give or take, in terms of manufactured exports. That's separate, of course, from the business that's done in Hong Kong, which reaches \$90 million in exports and \$80 million in manufactured goods.

It goes on, Mr. Speaker. Alberta businesses are doing business in South Korea, in Taiwan, in Mexico, throughout the European continent and the European Union. In the U.K. market alone there are exports exceeding \$230 million and manufactured exports exceeding \$150 million. Clearly we're talking about a sizable business exchange that goes on between Alberta and its global partners and its global business associates. I think that's why we would like to see the highest quality information and the highest level of disclosure when it comes to how the Alberta government is supporting these initiatives, is making sure that money is spent where it needs to be spent and that we're getting value for those tax dollars.

I appreciate the minister's undertaking to provide both some reasonable amendments and also some high-quality information.

[Written Question 8 as amended carried]

Highway Maintenance

Q10. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mrs. Soetaert that the following question be accepted.

How much has the government saved each year from 1996-97 to 1998-99 as a result of contracting out highway maintenance, and on what evidence are the figures based?

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

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Written Question 10 the hon. member is inquiring of the government as to the amount of savings for the years '96-97 and then again '98-99 as a result of the contracting out of highway maintenance and for some evidence as to those particular figures.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Now, there have been no amendments coming forward, so I'm not sure if the government wants to accept this and provide that information on some restricted basis, with some amendment in place, whatever. The question that has been put forward by the member is a very, very valid question, because when we start getting into the privatization question, the measurement of dollars, the measurement of efficiency in terms of those dollars, and the measurement of output in terms of those dollars become very, very important. I've had lots of Albertans tell me that since the maintenance of highways throughout the province has been privatized or contracted out, the road conditions have deteriorated considerably. I'm not sure if other members have heard that. I'm not sure if other members, as they're driving to wherever home is, feel all those bumps on the road that you didn't have years ago.

Obviously, if the government's concept or perception, which I disagree with incidentally, is that by contracting out you save money and if the level of service being provided is of a lesser level, then there should not only be savings from the contracting out to the

private sector but also additional savings because the same degree of performance is not being achieved. In other words, it's lesser quality.

On this question of the benefits of privatization, yeah, in some instances privatization can work very, very well. There's no question about it. But there are other instances where the taxpayer says: "I pay good money for certain things. I pay good money in taxes and such to have roadways that are worthy of the vehicle that I'm driving. I don't want that vehicle of mine breaking down because of roadway conditions, because some private contractor hasn't done the work up to par." It may be saving the government a few bucks and he might save himself \$2 in terms of taxes in his wallet, but then he's laying out \$800 for a new transmission.

We see that happen, Madam Speaker. We not only see that happen on the highways; we see similar complaints in the municipalities. I can remember that during my days on city council it was a very, very standard, typical argument where somebody would say: so you guys are trying to save a few bucks by only paving this roadway every 10 years instead of every five years. Meanwhile, it's cost him three tires, one transmission, a clutch, and such; in other words, \$2,400 worth of repairs so that he can save about 75 cents on his tax bill. So it's a false economy.

Madam Speaker, as I wrap up, I touch on privatization. It is impossible to touch on privatization without at least referring to Bill 11 in passing. That's all I'm going to do, just refer to Bill 11 in passing, because we're not dealing with that bill. We're dealing with the aspect of privatization of roadway maintenance.

Madam Speaker, I'm trying to remember the rules here now. The minister is going to get up and respond and may accept the question, but if he doesn't accept the question, then of course my colleagues will also have the opportunity to speak.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure what games are going on this afternoon. It looks like we're going to be debating written questions and motions for returns all afternoon, perhaps so that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't have to come and promote her bill. Maybe she's decided not to bring forward Bill 207 this afternoon.

MR. SAPERS: Is this relevant?

MR. HANCOCK: It's very relevant to the whole question, because it's normal in the House to ask whether a question will be accepted. Of course I'm more than delighted to indicate on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure that we'll be prepared to accept this question.

Don't be so sensitive over there, Edmonton-Glenora.

3:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing that the minister was good enough to accept the question, I'm going to be good enough to commend him for it, thank him for it, and say that I have no further comment on it.

[Written Question 10 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Deputy Government House Leader it's my pleasure, proper notice having been given yesterday, to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 13, 14, 15, 16, and 24.

[Motion carried]

Special Waste Treatment Centre

M13. Mr. Gibbons moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the plan that Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. and Bovar Inc. were required to draw up under the enforcement order that was announced by Alberta environmental protection on January 15, 1997, showing how they will address all sources of PCBs, dioxins, and furans identified in the inventory required by the enforcement order together with a copy of any design plans that were subsequently drawn up to address any potential adverse impacts on the environment and any evaluation of these plans carried out by or for those companies or Alberta Environment or Alberta environmental protection from that time until February 28, 2000.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I move to reject Motion for a Return 13. In light of the ongoing investigation into this incident, I'm not able to provide the information requested here and must reject the motion accordingly. I am however able to provide the assessment plan required of Chem-Security and Bovar and will undertake to table the same requisite number of copies following the vote.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. The whole legacy with this government and Bovar is an interesting one, and it's been an expensive one. We seem to go a couple of steps forward and then two or three steps backward every time the opposition asks for information. This really is a made-in-Alberta boondoggle, and there are some very serious concerns that persist to this very minute regarding the environmental safety of some of the things that are going on in and around that plant.

This is a very reasonable request. Albertans deserve to know how Alberta Environment will address sources of PCBs, dioxins, and furans identified in the inventory required by the enforcement order that came about as a result of this very significant problem. The minister just said that he's unable to comply, and he didn't really tell us why.

I think Albertans want a little more clarity from this minister on this very important issue. This is not going to go away, and it certainly doesn't make any sense for the government to bury its head collectively in the sand on these environmental problems. We should fess up to them so we can try to correct them the best we can. The more disclosure there is, the greater the understanding will be and the easier it will be to address the issue.

This is a serious concern of mine, because not only are Albertans still paying the tab, but because of the deal that was negotiated, Albertans will have to pick up the cost for any site cleanup and remediation. In the meantime we can't even find out all the details that we could reasonably expect to receive from this government of the adverse impacts on the environment as a result of some problems at that particular site.

This minister, I think, will probably want to be remembered for being a good steward of the environment. I think this minister will

probably want to be remembered for always doing the right thing and not just the political thing, and he can certainly begin working on that legacy by reconsidering his rejection of this motion for a return.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased that we are receiving some of the information. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie thought that this one was going to be accepted and was going to be quite happy that some easy information was going to come forward, but it continues to be an ongoing issue, especially now that the Premier has actually broken his promise to Albertans by allowing hazardous waste to be imported from out of the country. The first delivery from Japan is expected any day now. So it's a major concern. When the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie left here today, she thought this one would be totally accepted and that even with their legal problems there would be some forthcoming information from this department.

So I'm closing debate right now, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Consistent with my earlier undertaking to provide the assessment plan required of Chem-Security and Bovar, I'd like to table the requisite number of copies with the House.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

M14. Mr. Gibbons moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a monthly summary of all monitoring results and any individual values that exceed permitted limits from April 1, 1997, to February 28, 2000, collected by Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. and Bovar Inc. as required by the approval to operate the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre at Swan Hills and by the enforcement order announced by Alberta environmental protection on January 15, 1997.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to move that Motion for a Return 14 be amended by striking out the expression "and by the enforcement order announced by Alberta environmental protection on January 15, 1997." Accordingly, the amended motion for a return would read:

... a monthly summary of all monitoring results and any individual values that exceed permitted limits from April 1, 1997, to February 28, 2000, collected by Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. and Bovar Inc. as required by the approval to operate the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre at Swan Hills.

Madam Speaker, once again, in light of the ongoing investigation into this incident, I'm not able to provide the information requested based on the enforcement order of January 15, 1997. The monitoring results required outside this order are public information and will be provided accordingly.

4:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thanks very much. The amendment on the

face of it appears reasonable. While we're disappointed with the results of the earlier motion for a return, we will take a look at the enforcement order just tabled by the minister. The information from this amended motion will help fill in the picture a little bit. We'll review the information. I know my colleague will get back to the minister, and there'll be some subsequent follow-up questions.

Contrary to what the Government House Leader may have said on the record before in terms of this being a game, this is a sincere attempt on the part of the Official Opposition to obtain information that is of interest to the public and is in keeping with our capacity as the Official Opposition, which is in part to hold the government accountable on behalf of all taxpayers and even, interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, some who maybe even voted for the government.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendment, hon. member.

MR. GIBBONS: Madam Speaker, I rise to close debate and will accept the amendment as given.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, there is no closing of debate on an amendment.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. We'll let the amendment go.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Now on the motion as amended. Hon. member, you will be closing debate.

MR. GIBBONS: I will. Thank you. I rise to close debate with the amendment and accept the information. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 14 as amended carried]

Forest Service Contracts

M15. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all contracts issued by the Alberta forest service in the calendar year 1999 indicating the purpose of each contract, the name of the company to which it was awarded, and whether the contract was awarded as a result of a public tendering process.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a legitimate question that's being asked, with no game playing involved. If the minister over there would indicate to me whether it's going to be accepted, I could minimize my comments. [interjection] You have to get up and say that publicly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I need someone to respond, please. The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I would move to accept Motion for a Return 15 with these comments. It is a poorly worded question as there is no entity as the Alberta forest service, and there has not been since 1993. I believe the hon. member was referring to the land and forest service, the correct name. I would have thought that the member opposite would have known that by now. However, I do accept this motion in the spirit in which it was asked.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, to close debate, let me remind the minister that Motion for a Return 15 was prepared by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. Even though he's a colleague of mine, I'm not going to take the fall for him on this one. He's on his own, quite frankly.

In any case, I thank the minister for accepting the motion for a return, and I will have no further comment on it.

[Motion for a Return 15 carried]

Government Reorganization Secretariat

M16. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Government Reorganization Secretariat between May 26, 1999, and February 17, 2000, relating to a review of government agencies, boards, and commissions.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, this is entirely in keeping with the government's commitment to disclose the results of this study. There are several – and the number seems to grow almost daily – government boards, agencies, and commissions doing delegated work on behalf of the government. Often they operate without the same degree of accountability or transparency or openness as other parts of the government, and sometimes we come to the conclusion that the government sets up these delegated organizations simply for the purpose of avoiding public scrutiny.

So we think it would be very worth while if the government would disclose studies or reports prepared by or for the secretariat relating to the review of government agencies, boards, and commissions. I think those reports would be of great interest to anybody who follows the public policy process in this province.

I've had no indication from the government whether this motion is going to be accepted or rejected. I've had no notification of an amendment. I can only hope that this lack of prior notice indicates speedy and willing acceptance.

DR. WEST: Madam Speaker, it's amazing. I've read quite a few motions for returns that have been directed towards this department, and I have to say that a lot of them are almost fishing trips, looking for things that may or may not be. If they would just come forth and ask beforehand, they would save this Assembly a lot of trouble in whether they accept or reject something and give an explanation. If they'd just come and ask. I mean, we are open. The door to my office is open, and if the hon. member has some questions about the reorganization secretariat, I have no problem. This area is the vice-chair's area. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat is doing the work on the boards, agencies, and commissions.

It's work in progress. The work is not finished. I reject this motion on that premise. Certainly we are open for discussion, to come and discuss how it's going and what we're doing. To say that there is a start or end point by some study or by some report – it's work in progress.

The other side of this. I would recommend to the member who is interested in understanding government reorganization and what we're doing that there are several books out termed Shared Services or the Reorganization of Government or Government Administra-

tion. They're in the libraries, and there is more on the Internet. If the hon. member would come to either myself as chairman of the reorganization or the vice-chair as it relates, they'd be glad to get references so that they can go to the library and read at night, and then we wouldn't be wasting the time of this Assembly with these redundant types of motions for returns.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. It's perhaps a good thing to see the Acting Treasurer bring his customary feistiness to his new portfolio.

I'd make this observation. In 1993 when we were talking about the need for a genuinely open government, we talked about the need for a freedom of information regime. The calculation then was that something like 72 percent of written questions and motions for returns were spurned, rejected, discounted, dismissed by the government of the day. Now, there's been some progress. I'm happy to report that actually the success rate now in terms of motions for returns and written questions is significantly higher than it was in 1993, but it's not 100 percent. We still have ministers that come forward and in a dismissive way reject legitimate, genuine requests for information, requests as written questions, requests for documents under motions for returns.

4:10

You know, to hear the flip response from the Acting Treasurer – let's just think about what he's told us. What he's told us is that we're welcome to go to the Internet and that he's got a couple of books in his library he's prepared to share. I mean, I still expect he's got Gaebler's *Reinventing Government*. He's probably put a few more on top, but that probably has an honoured spot in his bookcase.

DR. WEST: Never read it. I'm writing a book for him.

MR. DICKSON: I'm sorry. He read Sir Roger Douglas's New Zealand version of Gaebler's book *Reinventing Government*.

The point, Madam Speaker, is this. This is not like reading the literary review in the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Vermilion Times*. What I want to know and what my colleagues want to know are the studies that are undertaken by the government of the province of Alberta, paid for by the taxpayers of the province of Alberta. That's what we're asking for.

The minister insults every single Albertan when he says, in effect: go to the library; go to the Internet. Why should we have to do that? We have a government that you would think somewhere in their \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau budget would be able to find a means to be able to make accessible to the people of this province the information that's gathered, that we paid for, about our resources, about our reorganization. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. [interjection] Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I guess it's an indication when your colleagues lose faith in the observations being made by their colleague. They're trying to crowd me off the platform so they can make some observations of their own, that I think will be much better.

DR. WEST: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: There's a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

DR. WEST: Madam Speaker, there was reference made just a minute ago in this House as to my presence or not, and I want that corrected here. That is improper conduct in this House. I either want an apology or a retraction of what they said because I'm still here, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: I'm the one that had the floor. I'm the one that was speaking, and I made no reference to this minister leaving. He's put it on the record now himself. Every time a member of the opposition gets up to walk out in question period, we hear the catcalls and we hear the good-byes and the waves. That happens all the time, Madam Speaker. The point is that I'm the one that was speaking, and I didn't draw anybody's attention to the fact that the minister was fleeing from the Chamber because he didn't like to hear the arguments mounted against him.

Those are the points I wanted to make, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: If you'll recall, I interrupted the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and made reference to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood for exactly what the Acting Treasurer has stood up and made a point of order about. There is no need for people to do that. If I recall, earlier I heard the Speaker of this Assembly talk about decorum. Now, let's get on with the work of the Assembly. I don't think it was necessary to make any kind of comment as to what the Acting Treasurer was doing. He has rejected what you've asked for. I want to hear the debate take place in accordance with that.

Debate Continued

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Is there anyone else that wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Madam Speaker, I just want to make a point. The hon. Treasurer and minister of energy has alluded to reading some periodicals or books in the library, and I'm sure that that academic text is available to all of us, but what we're really looking for are the actual studies.

I have to reflect on what occurred in Public Accounts recently when the hon. Treasurer and minister of energy advised us, when we asked a similar question about presenting studies and tabling those, that studies weren't a big deal when it came to the electrical deregulation because this was ideology and ideology didn't have studies and therefore wasn't important.

Well, quite frankly, when you're making decisions that impact on all Albertans, impact on industry in this province, you have to have something that you're looking at. If this minister is telling us that those things just don't exist, then that's irresponsible government and that's poor management, quite frankly.

I'm hoping that he'll reconsider our request and he'll in fact put the actual studies and reports, the government reports, on the table for all Albertans to see and so we would know what's going on with this shared services reorganization, that he is telling us is going to save us a bunch of money when in fact there are studies out there that show just the opposite.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader and Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wouldn't normally intercede in a debate of this nature. The hon. Acting Treasurer has indicated that the question is being rejected. He indicated, as I heard him, that it was being rejected because the situation was a work in progress and that it wouldn't be appropriate to provide reports at this time. I'm not sure that there even are reports at this time.

The only reason I'm interceding in the debate is because Calgary-Buffalo tried to put a connotation on those remarks to suggest that the hon. minister of natural resources and Acting Provincial Treasurer, a hardworking, dedicated servant of the people of this province, was somehow hiding something, was somehow being flippant with them. He was being sincere, honest, and open, as is his wont, and that should be on the record.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf of Lethbridge-East to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much. This is very entertaining, and it's nice to see some rootin'-tootin' participation here from the provincial minister of both of those portfolios that he's minister of now.

A couple of comments about the rejection. When the minister of natural resources says, "Just call me," I think the people that are going to be reviewing *Hansard* have to know that this minister who says, "Just call me and I'll give you answers to information," is the very same minister who has sat in this Chamber and ripped up amendments and bills put forward by private members in this Assembly. This is the very same minister who has refused to answer questions during budget estimates and has said on the record that he won't answer questions.

DR. WEST: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Go ahead.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

DR. WEST: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). These comments are to disrupt this House and bring me to my feet. He had better bring forth some proof of what he's just been saying. He's making allegations about another member in this House, about habits that they have. He does not know that I rip up amendments or that I don't answer questions. I've been through the budget process, and I've answered all their questions. What is the inference this member is doing here? He is damaging my reputation to function in this House by putting allegations out that could be false. Prove it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. Yeah, I will. Of course, as the Speaker has often said, you have to take all hon. members at their word. I've seen that minister rip up bills. I've seen that minister rip up amendments. You know, Madam Speaker, if he's not going to admit it, then that's his responsibility, but I've certainly seen it happen. If he's a little sensitive about his own behaviour, that's his problem, and he certainly doesn't need me to do anything to damage his reputation.

4:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I'm a little concerned here. I don't like it when allegations of a

personal nature are made against another member. As the Acting Treasurer said when he rose on the point of order, you are making an assumption. I don't like assumptions and I don't like allegations.

I have noted with great interest all afternoon that more and more of this debate in this Assembly is becoming personal, very personal. I want you to know that Albertans who tune in and watch question period and see what goes on in this Assembly are very, very discouraged. We are supposed to set an example. I believe the hon. Acting Treasurer is right in seeking something here. I don't like to hear when someone accuses someone else of something. I have no idea what the hon. Acting Treasurer does with amendments, nor do you really.

MR. SAPERS: I've seen him do it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I have no idea what you just tore up now. Does anybody else in this Assembly?

Now we are going to proceed with the work that we are to do this afternoon. I want everyone in this Assembly to stay away from personal remarks. Let us get on with the business at hand, quickly.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: As I was saying, of course those activities and those actions make it very difficult to take with any seriousness this minister when he says: just call me.

Now, on the issue of whether or not we're dealing with a work in progress, I would like to draw all members' attention to the motion for a return as it's written, which is: copies "of all studies and reports prepared by or for the government" relating to the review. The motion for a return is not asking for the final report. We recognize that it is a work in progress. In fact, I have correspondence from the Member for Medicine Hat dated February 24, 2000, in response to a letter that I sent him. He said that it would be premature to provide the final report or further information.

So now we've asked the question. We have done what the Acting Treasurer has said. We have simply gone and asked the member for the information. They haven't provided it. We understand that it's a work in progress, but we also know that they've done some preliminary work in advance. So that's what we're asking for, the preliminary work. It's very disingenuous to say, "Just ask me," when in fact we did ask and received the response on February 24 saying: we're not going to give you the information. If the government wants to keep things secret from Albertans, I guess they can do that for the time being, but I think they should at least be up front and say: no; we're just going to keep it secret. They shouldn't try to mislead people by saying: just ask.

[Motion for a Return 16 lost]

Trade Offices and Consultants

M24. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of activity reports prepared by the Department of Economic Development on Alberta trade offices and trade consultants abroad for the fiscal years 1997-98 and 1998-99.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment on behalf of the hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that Motion for a Return 24 be amended by striking out the expression "activity reports" and substituting "monthly report summaries" and also

striking out the expression "and trade consultants." Accordingly, the motion would now read:

... copies of monthly report summaries prepared by the Department of Economic Development on Alberta trade offices abroad for the fiscal years 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Madam Speaker, activity reports generated by the trade offices and consultants contain third-party confidential information, the disclosure of which is not appropriate. *Beauchesne* 446(2)(e) supports this exemption as well as sections 15 and 16 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The activity reports are summarized into monthly reports for trade offices, which provide information on the activity of trade offices without providing personal information.

[Motion for a Return 24 as amended carried]

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

head: Second Reading

Bill 206
School (Students' Code of Conduct)
Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned March 22: Dr. Nicol speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to rise to speak to Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. I'd like to commend and thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for bringing this private member's bill forward.

School violence is an issue that is very important to every Albertan, and solutions are especially valuable in addressing this problem. Events last year in Colorado and even closer to home, in Taber, Alberta, emphasized the necessity for governments to wake up and take notice.

This bill does exactly that. It shows that this government is proactively addressing some of the concerns surrounding this issue and deliberately finding solutions. This bill essentially requires school boards to implement codes of conduct for their students, combating school violence, substance abuse, and on-campus school discipline.

These codes of conduct would be clearly defined written agreements between schools and students in order to lay out acceptable standards of behaviour as well as consequences for infringement. In drafting a code of conduct, the school board would receive input from parents, students, teachers, and principals. This consultation is aimed at creating a community-based, stakeholder-driven code of conduct, reflecting the needs and priorities of a particular school district.

One unique attribute to this legislation is that it would provide a new approach to discipline by moving away from the traditional methods of suspension and expulsion to an approach of seeking rehabilitation. This way the code of conduct would include penalty options which allow students to continue their studies while offering counseling when necessary. Suspensions and expulsions of students would become a last resort.

Madam Speaker, by raising the standards of expectations for our students regarding their conduct, we are ensuring the safety of young people while at school or involved in school functions. Essentially, it will enable school administrators to nip in the bud any signs of deviant or violent behaviour that could pose a threat to other students.

In this way Bill 206 meets one of the fundamental priorities of this government: to provide Albertans with safe and strong communities. Bill 206 is a preventative initiative to reduce the incidence of school violence and youth crime in our province.

4:30

Madam Speaker, the untimely death of a young person often becomes a rallying point for a community as people come together expressing their grief and trying desperately to understand how such a tragedy could occur. When death occurs due to the violent actions of a fellow student, the questions and confusion that result are only amplified as the community tries to deal with the crisis they are facing.

This bill, Madam Speaker, seeks to address this problem by preventing violence before it occurs. Given that Alberta schools have experienced an increase in violence in recent years, this bill is in response to that fact and works to address the problem.

Madam Speaker, the province of Ontario in their Ministry of Education business plan for the year 1999-2000 stated that they are committed to introducing a provincewide code of conduct for students. Ontario's code of conduct would set minimum standards of behaviour and consequences for infractions. For example, the code would make expulsion automatic for students who bring weapons to school, provide drugs or alcohol to others, or who commit criminal assault. Suspension would be the minimum penalty for possessing drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers, or for vandalism.

Furthermore, a news release by the Ministry of Education stated that already the results were very positive. Students at a Toronto high school told the Ontario Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, that student life at the school has improved because of the school's code of conduct. In addition, the students said that the learning environment at the school was much better after the school introduced a code of conduct, because students are required to have respect for themselves, for others, and the responsibility of citizenship.

The Ontario government implemented a code of conduct based on input from parents who voiced their concerns that Ontario schools need to provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment. The news release also clearly stated the benefits to students, teachers, and schools. When the rules of behaviour are clear to everyone, students can get on with learning and teachers can get on with teaching.

Madam Speaker, I would imagine that with time a code of conduct would become a part of the school culture and would be easily accepted by all students and staff. Furthermore, I believe a student code of conduct would help in fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone knows what is expected of them.

School can often become a haven for youth who are faced with violence at home or in their neighbourhood. Students who can use their teacher and other staff as mentors and role models often find their time at school productive and their learning experience enhanced by the input of these individuals. Without mutual respect between staff and students these relationships are harmed and become unproductive. A student code of conduct that raises the standard of behaviour within a school learning environment will only benefit these relationships and may make them more attainable to students who face more challenges in their personal lives.

Simply put, a safe school is a place where students can receive a high-quality education without being threatened. This ultimately builds the level of trust among students and between students and teachers. When the level of trust goes up in any relationship, the potential for growth and learning – intellectually, emotionally, and physically – also increases. Madam Speaker, this is what we want

for our students in Alberta: a safe, secure environment in which they can learn and grow.

Some of the most important years in a child's life are the years of growing and changing, and this occurs most predominantly at the preschool age and when a child reaches their preteens and teenage years. These are the important years of growing and developing attitudes and behaviours that can last a lifetime. We want to do our best to develop the right attitudes and behaviours for our young people that will catapult them into a lifetime of success and happiness. Negative attitudes in learning environments will not produce these results, Madam Speaker.

Bill 206 is a step in the right direction to address the concerns surrounding school violence and youth crime. I would urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 206.

Madam Speaker, after listening to both sides of the Assembly, I think we've heard a lot of good comments. I would also urge the federal government to tighten their Young Offenders Act, because with the implementation of that act we have seen a lot of changes within our own youth that we never saw before, and I think we need to address that issue nationally, not only provincially.

So with that, Madam Speaker, thank you. I hope everybody supports Bill 206.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to speak a bit here on Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. Let's just look for a minute at what a code of conduct is all about. Obviously, there is a formal and an informal code of conduct in this Legislative Assembly, for example, that will permit certain things and not permit other things. Some of it is tradition, wearing a tie and wearing a sports coat, for example.

I'm not sure. If I were to enter this Assembly without a tie on, would I be allowed in? The former Speaker said no. Maybe the current Speaker would. I don't know if there's an actual code of conduct that states, "Thee must wear a tie," or if it's simply a tradition that's been passed on year to year.

I look in the news clippings today where we talk in terms of a code of conduct in the federal Parliament buildings. I know we're dealing with the schools, and I'm getting to the schools. Now, would this activity be allowed in this House, what has been allowed down there? They talk about the New Democrat caucus buying their fashion accessories from Home Depot. It appears that a number of the New Democrat MPs in Ottawa were wearing wing nuts. Why would they wear wing nuts? Well, they said that it was because of some statements made by our esteemed Premier here in the province of Alberta.

When I look at this bill, in the five minutes that I have to speak to it, let's see what it says first. Okay; we go to section 1: the policy regarding the various activities. Let's look at those activities. Physical violence. Yes, none of us want physical violence in the schools. The previous member made reference to Taber. We've seen it happen in schools in Calgary. At the school my niece goes to one of the young fellows that was considered overweight was picked upon. He was knifed. He was knifed to death in the schoolyard. No school condones that type of physical violence. No school is going to condone sexual assault, whether it be a student or a teacher, and we've seen instances of sexual assault occur. Sexual abuse. Vandalism. A teacher or a principal is not going to close their eyes and say that vandalism is fine or, going down, that you can possess a firearm or a dangerous weapon.

I got a call from a constituent the other day. The Edmonton

school board took away their child's right to attend that school forever and ever because that child had a penknife in his wallet. The blade was two inches long. I said to the mother: "I'm sorry. I can't go to bat for you on this one. The boy did wrong." In terms of the violence occurring in the schools, the boy did wrong.

4:40

After I finished speaking to her, it suddenly dawned on me that I had given my oldest granddaughter, who was 10, this seven-in-one tool. It has a screwdriver, a punch, a pair of scissors. Unfortunately, it also has a knife. I thought: "Oh, my God, did I give her a dangerous weapon? If they find it on her, she can be suspended?" Fortunately, her mother had the good sense to tape that blade down so it couldn't be opened. But those types of things can happen.

That's where the situation has got to in terms of school violence and the precautions that have to be taken. School boards themselves very capably set those policies in place, and they should, because it will differ in various parts of the province.

It's the same with dress. Some schools can actually have a uniform code, that everybody has to dress per uniform. In Edmonton it could work, but in rural Alberta, where some of the students have to go home at lunchtime and do some farming – feed the cattle, milk the cows, or whatever – they can't be going with a real nice uniform on. They don't have time to change and that. Sometimes they rush home after school. They don't even have time to change. They've got to go attend to the chores right now. So to work, discretion has to be given to the individual school boards.

I could see an umbrella saying that we encourage school boards to develop the policies and such, but the school boards I think are very capable. If we go back years ago and we talk in terms of a code of conduct, when I was in grade 1, going to a little rural school, do you know what was acceptable? One of the rich kids – I guess the only rich kid in the school. His father owned a gas station and a rural grocery store. His father came back from Duluth in the States. He brought back a switchblade knife as a present for his son who was in grade 4. You couldn't buy them in Canada then. We all thought it was great. The teacher didn't say anything. Back then it was acceptable, but times have changed.

I can recall a teacher of ours that got rather rambunctious. I was in grade 2, so he appeared to me to be quite mature. He was probably only 18 or 19. At recess time we used to go out and pretend that we were Robin Hood. We'd go in the bush, carve off these pointed sticks and go chasing each other. One kid got a stick right in the windpipe, in the neck, and he lay there gasping for breath. We thought he was going to die. He was rushed to the hospital. Obviously, that teacher was fired.

Back in those days they didn't have a code of conduct in that school board. I don't think any of them did. If there was physical violence in the yard, for example, we would scrap it out as youngsters. We would just scrap it out. The best man wins, and I always lost.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close debate on Bill 206.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We really appreciated all the input that we've got from both sides of the House on this particular issue. It's very enlightening to hear different members speak about not only their personal experiences but their own philosophy towards how society should make its own rules and how it should control and govern itself.

We don't often have an opportunity to talk about some of the good

things that we can do for today's society, neither do we have much opportunity to set a firm foundation on how society could conduct itself in the future. Each and every one of us, I'm sure, at times has talked about and also examined some of the things that we all need to do, and that's to concentrate on what's important to us and how we conduct ourselves in our personal lives, in our business lives, and in our public lives.

We've even had times in this Assembly within the last week to examine and to question our own conduct here in this Assembly, and within the last 24 hours specifically we've had to refer to a written agreement between all parties of this Assembly and participate in the discipline required to maintain the decorum that we need to see progress in the business that we do here to make for a better Alberta.

We've been debating the principles of Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. In that debate we heard from a number of members why school boards should develop a written code of conduct and how that code of conduct should be developed through the collective involvement of teachers, parents, and students so that a successful code of conduct may be of benefit to the learning environment.

I'm grateful for the testaments and the experiences, some of them very personal, that some hon. members have had in being part of and developing a code of conduct. The fact that much of this was done on a volunteer basis I think is a bonus. It tells me for sure and everyone who is concerned about a safe school that a successful code of conduct properly prepared can work.

We had some questions about why this bill is needed and the fact that some school boards don't have codes of conduct or even policies on rules. Yes, they all have rules, but some boards don't have policies on rules or rule setting or the implementation or the consequences of those rules and the actions of students. Madam Speaker, we are trying to determine the accurate figures on those questions, but generally it is known that about 75 percent of the schools in this province have rules and/or codes of conduct. I'll be pleased to share with the hon. members an update on those figures after our research is done. I'm sure that we'll have an opportunity in Committee of the Whole to talk about actual figures of school boards and schools that do have some set of rules.

But the fact that some have a code of conduct should not prohibit all schools from having a written set of rules. This bill will reaffirm some of the values we wish to preserve for society and pass on to our young people. I just want to make mention of one thing about this bill. I've been receiving some calls, many of them supportive of the bill, but many questions have come forward and say that if a school has a code of conduct and they find that it works and they are happy with it, can they keep it? The answer to that is yes. If they are presently developing one, I'm encouraging parents, I'm encouraging teachers that have called me to keep working on it. This bill will not preclude your hard work.

Just as our own written agreement worked in this Assembly, it can work for our young people too, and we are an example and should be an example to our young people. So, Madam Speaker, in moving second reading of Bill 206, I ask for all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and to present Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act.

Madam Speaker, the object of Bill 207 is to provide local governments in Alberta, whether they be for rural or urban municipalities, with access to a portion of provincial personal income tax in order to create a more stable and a more predictable funding framework between the province and local governments and to provide our municipalities across Alberta with an enhanced ability to meet their priorities on a medium- and a long-term basis in accordance with fulfilling their significant roles and responsibilities.

The bill is presented as a positive opportunity to discuss some of the issues that are very much affecting our province today. The bill is put forward as a discussion opportunity, an opportunity to look at some of the messages that have come to us as legislators from provincial associations like the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, where they have clearly outlined the problems they face as municipalities when, in the context of the last decade, municipal grants have been reduced substantially, and along with that has been downloaded responsibility from the provincial government, leaving our municipalities not knowing what the long-term funding framework looks like for them, therefore unable to deal with and deliver the kinds of services that we need in our local communities.

4:50

On many occasions when I have been privileged to meet with groups within our municipalities around Alberta, I have talked to them about the reality of our world today, where we have very much global trade, global communications, global access to communication and information. However, when it comes right down to it, we live in our local community, whether that be our town or our neighbourhood or our city. It really doesn't matter the form it might take. What matters is that that is the environment where we raise our families, where our children go to school, where we return to at the end of each day, that local community which is so important. In Alberta that local community is defined by a municipal structure, and we believe that a new partnership needs to be forged between the provincial government and our municipalities, a true partnership because of the level of maturity and growth that our municipalities have reached in this past decade certainly, but it's time for a new arrangement.

This bill suggests one mechanism by which that partnership agreement could be structured, matching both roles and responsibilities for our municipalities with the resources, both fiscal and economic, to build the communities, but we don't for one moment believe this is the only option. This legislation was built on the basis of the legislative framework that exists in the province of Manitoba, but there are certainly other options that could look at this subject of revenue sharing with kind of a 21st century perspective.

I've been around this provincial government long enough to recall a former Deputy Premier and actually the MLA for Barrhead, Dr. Horner, who served this Legislature very, very effectively as the MLA for Barrhead, but he let slip a comment many years ago, in the mid-70s, that in fact the municipalities were the children of the province. In fact, it was probably a very accurate statement, and it was a statement that I think prevails today with the provincial government: this whole notion that the municipalities exist and have given to them their allowance, if you like, in a more parent/child relationship as opposed to what we think our municipalities are capable of, which is a far more mature relationship, reflecting certainly the very sophisticated, corporate in many cases, municipal structures that are now in place. It's time for a new partnership, a

time for a new vision, a time to move away from a '70s perspective into a 21st century perspective with our municipalities and become the true partners that we can.

Bill 207 proposes to allocate a percentage of personal income tax revenues to Alberta municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001. This would allow the province to eliminate unstable and unpredictable grant programs and to provide a framework for increased accountability for our municipalities, responsiveness, efficiency, and fairness between the province and local governments.

Bill 207 is just one component of the Official Opposition's initiative to create a new partnership between the province and local governments by developing a system of, number one, predictable funding arrangements with our municipalities; secondly, clarifying this whole issue of the division of powers between the province and the municipalities, the roles and the responsibilities that we expect for our municipalities; and finally, allowing local governments to determine infrastructure priorities required to sustain their economic and human development within their own boundaries.

As I indicated, Madam Speaker, Bill 207 is modeled after the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act in the province of Manitoba. Unfortunately, because Bill 207 is a private member's bill, it is restricted from having a number of important elements, including a mechanism through which the municipalities would be able to access the income tax base. As all members are aware, private members' bills cannot deal specifically with money issues since nongovernment members are unable to introduce a money bill in the Legislature. Nonetheless, what Bill 207 does do is provide that framework for a discussion. Certainly it's one that's generating a lot of discussion with municipalities around the province and generating discussion with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the AAMD and C and, as well, even most recently with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, with whom we had the privilege to meet in the last couple of weeks.

So that's the background on the mechanism to actually transfer, if you like, a portion of income tax to the municipalities, which, of course, we can't do because it's a private member's bill. It's not included in the text, but it's certainly part of the overall discussion framework, and I think it's an important focus for the discussion.

Funding arrangements between the province and local governments are an important component in clarifying the roles and responsibilities and establishing clear lines of accountability to citizens. The Official Opposition wants to encourage an informed participatory debate with our citizens and with all members of the Legislature as a means of ensuring and looking ahead to our local governments and giving them some promise of a new relationship that might emerge as a result. We certainly encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly, as well as all Albertans, to express their views and to continue to express their interest.

We then move to the three elements which we think are important in this debate. The first one, in terms of the policy of which this is part of what we've been building across the province, is this whole issue of stable and predictable funding. I thought I might quote from the Alberta Urban Municipalities' initiatives proposed for the provincial budget which was put out in February of this year, February 2000. This was a statement of offering a new perspective and a solution, if you like, to the Provincial Treasurer as he prepared for his budget. I'd like to quote the AUMA when they say:

The province should include, as part of their business plan, the creation of a legislative framework that would give municipalities access to a stable and long-term source of revenue to ensure self-sufficiency and sustainability. Continued reliance on the province for grants and other programs prevents municipalities from becoming

self-sufficient. Access to a stable source of revenue is the best way to ensure municipalities remain sustainable during high growth periods or economic downturns.

Thus, Bill 207 is a product of the initiative of the Official Opposition to forge this new partnership.

Adequate fiscal capacity at the local level is the only way a municipality can control the services that they offer and thus be held accountable for their expenditures. Local governments must be fiscally responsible to their citizens, but in order to be so, they must have access to stable and predictable sources of revenue that will allow them to meet these roles and responsibilities that have been outlined and shared and agreed to between them and the province in an efficient and effective manner.

5:00

In the past decade local government responsibilities have exceeded and grown faster than the opportunities to raise revenues from local sources have. This has been exacerbated, especially over the last eight years, by the provincial government's unilateral reductions to provincial grants and the intrusion into the local property tax field through the provincial education property tax. According to Statistics Canada, between 1992 and '98 general and specific grants from the Alberta government to municipalities declined by \$402 million, or 48 percent, the second highest level of decline in any province in Canada. When increased responsibilities are given to or downloaded, as we know, onto local government, it is only fair that adequate funding to support these responsibilities should follow, yet Alberta's property tax base has been fragmented by the province's reliance on the education property tax. This creates problems of accountability and uncertainty for our municipalities.

According to Statistics Canada the Alberta government collected nearly 46 percent of the real and general property taxes generated in the province during 1998, the third highest percentage amongst all Canadian provinces. Meanwhile, in addition to that, the provincial education property tax burden on residential properties in Alberta increased by \$87 million, or the 13 percent that we have referred to frequently, between 1995 and 1999. That's an increase in the provincial education property tax of 13 percent, or \$87 million. Our municipalities are well aware of that increase, as are our local property tax payers.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Provincial revenue sources are growing at a much faster rate than local government revenue sources. We're certainly well aware that our municipalities are not talking about tax cuts in the same way that the provincial government is. Yet if we look between 1992-3 and 1999-2000, Alberta's own share of revenues grew by a cumulative 51 percent, or an average of 7.3 percent growth per year provincially. Between the same period Alberta's personal income tax revenues grew by a cumulated 78 percent, or an average of 11 percent per year.

On the other hand, the wide disparity between the fiscal capacity and responsibility of the Alberta government and local governments is clear. The revenue-sharing mechanisms within Bill 207 would assist in reducing this disparity and ensure that the fiscal capacity more adequately responds with the roles and the responsibilities of our local municipalities.

In the response to the provincial budget the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association said:

An increase in the infrastructure dollars for municipalities is welcome news, however, short term funding is no substitute for long term planning.

This is from our own Urban Municipalities Association. "The Government . . . has not addressed the need for long term financial solutions."

In short, Mr. Speaker, we believe that a predictable funding framework for our municipalities alongside a clear and defined role of whose responsibility is whose between the province and the municipalities is long overdue in this province. It is time to reflect that our municipalities have grown up from the childlike treatment that they get from the provincial government, and it is now time for a new partnership that's reflective of the reality as well as the hope for the future of our municipalities.

In terms of the third component of what we in the Official Opposition have been talking about with our municipalities and our important municipal associations, the issue of stable, predictable, and longer term infrastructure planning dollars is very, very important. While the provincial government certainly opened up, to the credit of the Municipal Affairs minister, some important dollars for infrastructure in the last year, unfortunately that doesn't give the longer term planning framework that must be in place for our municipalities.

We know from a development point of view that municipalities have to plan subdivisions seven to 10 years out, yet if they only have the infrastructure plan for two or three years or even less, there's not a match between the services that they need to be performed and the resources they are given to perform them and to perform and plan them and manage them effectively. Add on top of that the down-loading from the provincial government in terms of increasing the responsibilities of municipalities, and you have the clash of those two things coming together and major concerns about whether the infrastructure planning is coming at an appropriate level and whether in fact we might be wasting taxpayers' dollars.

Let me quote the Auditor General, who has certainly noted this trend in his report and who made the following comments on this issue of infrastructure planning. He said:

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

which anticipates and justifies funding required.

That's the kind of mature relationship we believe our municipalities deserve, and I urge all members to support Bill 207 and invite all members to participate in the debate, which we will certainly be sharing with the urban and rural municipalities associations and the many, many municipalities including our major cities of Edmonton and Calgary as the debate ensues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and speak about government support regarding our municipalities, what we consider the pillar, the foundation of this province. Certainly working with the municipalities is going to be our key to developing a stronger province, and we all very well appreciate it.

First of all, I'm a little surprised at the content of Bill 207 in that to me it certainly appears to be very close to being a money bill, one that indeed is appropriating money fairly directly. It was my understanding that private members were not to be dealing with money bills. Nevertheless, we do have the bill here, so ultimately I'll be very, very pleased to be involved in discussions regarding this particular bill.

I listened intently to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and with great interest, because indeed we are involved in ongoing discussions with municipalities, with our colleagues in the Alberta Urban Municipalities as well as the AAMD and C. The municipalities do face challenges. We acknowledge that. Indeed, listening to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I was impressed by the identification of her presentation. She was very rich in challenges but very, very short on solutions. The solution that came forward was simply to add more money. That's very similar to the usual solutions that come forward from across the way, so I guess I shouldn't have been too surprised regarding this.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to get into some depth on our workings with the municipal organizations, and I would like to be able to do it all in one presentation, so at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]