

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 2, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Unknown Soldier Ceremony

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, tomorrow morning at 10:30 on the steps of the main entrance to the Legislature Building a ceremony will take place to commemorate the repatriation and interment of the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier who is to represent Canada's war dead and those who have died in the service of peace for this country.

A small quantity of soil taken from the north, south, east, and west of the Alberta Legislature Grounds will be deposited on the grave at the interment of the remains in Ottawa. This action is intended to signify that the province's contribution in war was drawn from all corners of our province. Alberta's soil will be delivered by a Royal Canadian Legion representative.

All provinces have been asked to participate in this project, which will be completed in a ceremony to take place in Ottawa on May 28, 2000.

I invite you all to join us for this important event tomorrow morning.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we seem to have a long list today so a little patience.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table in the Legislature today a petition signed by 20 residents of Harvie Heights, Banff, and Canmore requesting 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."

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition signed by over 200 Albertans, and it is: "we . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file a petition signed by 179 constituents from the Wainwright constituency and surrounding areas. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to table a petition from 79 residents of the Barrhead and Westlock area who want to urge the government to reinstate the front licence plate on all registered vehicles in Alberta.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 221 Albertans from Beaumont, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, Millet, and Edmonton. They are asking the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd present a petition signed by 220 citizens from Sherwood Park, Tofield, Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. The petition urges "the government of Alberta 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, too, have a petition signed by 444 people from Wabamun, Drayton Valley, Redwater, Radway, Thorhild, Jasper, Hinton, Grande Cache, Camrose, Thorsby, Olds, Vegreville, and Onoway and another set from Lethbridge, Purple Springs, Taber, Medicine Hat, Redcliff, Grassy Lake, Airdrie, Blairmore, and Coleman. They are all urging 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 have the pleasure today to present a petition signed by 157 Albertans from St. Albert, Stony Plain, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, De Winton, and Edmonton, and they are all urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 219 Albertans from Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Irma, Stony Plain, Beaumont, and Edmonton, and this is urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure to present a petition today on behalf of 187 residents of Alberta from St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton urging the government to stop putting money toward private and more into public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislature signed by citizens of Alberta from La

Crete, Worsley, Bear Canyon, Cherry Point, Grande Prairie, Hines Creek, and Fairview. The petition states:

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, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly. It is from 221 Albertans from the following communities: Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and of course Edmonton. This petition reads:

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.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured this afternoon to present a petition signed by 237 fellow Calgarians living in Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Bow, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Currie, and Calgary-Lougheed constituencies. These Calgarians are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased today with your permission to table petitions signed by 211 citizens from the communities of Carvel, St. Albert, Morinville, and Edmonton. The citizens are urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would like to present to the Assembly the following petition:

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

This petition has been signed by 185 residents of Leduc, Niton Junction, Mayerthorpe, Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, Tofield, and of course Edmonton.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table a petition from over 300 people in Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, and Edmonton urging the Legislative Assembly to have the government "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." Today's total is 3,112, bringing the total of this particular petition to date of almost 68,000 Albertans.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition this afternoon. It's signed by 220 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Beaumont, St. Albert, Ponoka, Stony Plain, Leduc, and Edmonton, and they are requesting that the government of Alberta "stop promoting private health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition with 202 signatures of Albertans from Mundare, Leduc, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Ardrossan, Beaumont, and Edmonton urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present two petitions today. The first one is signed by 302 Albertans from Camrose, Canmore, Bluffton, Banff, Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge, and the people signing the petition are requesting the 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."

1:40

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 40 Albertans. They are from Lamont, Calgary, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Cochrane, Canmore, and Strathmore. The petition reads as follows:

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to petition the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

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

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.

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to petition the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would request that the petition which I presented to the Legislative Assembly on April 20 on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Calder regarding the government's undermining of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that at this point the petition I presented on May 1 with respect to opposition to private health care now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday in the Legislative Assembly urging the government to stop the promotion of private health care and to promote public health care now be 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 Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I put in yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed: Bill Pr. 3, Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to

Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17, 18, 19, and 20.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 29, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, and 46.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, as required under the Insurance Act, I'd like to table copies of the annual report for the Automobile Insurance Board for the year ended December 31, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five letters from all the police forces in Alberta, being the RCMP, the Edmonton and Calgary city police forces, Camrose, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. They are all in favour of Motion 509, the reinstatement of front licence plates.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of tablings for today. The first one is a set of five amendments to Bill 11 that I now understand won't be available to the Assembly for debate if the motion for closure is passed today.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a set of three letters, one from Calgary, one from Edmonton, and one from Didsbury, opposing Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today all opposed to Bill 11. For the record I'll read the names of those opposing: Duane Dawson, Jessica Chapman, and Steven Lamoureux.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is correspondence from Brian Fish, a solicitor here in Edmonton. Specifically, Mr. Fish asked for an investigation to occur with respect to special interest groups lobbying this government to create loopholes in our health care law so that they can make private profit out of the public health care system. I have included the response from the Minister of Justice, which did not answer that question.

My second tabling is also correspondence relative to citizens' and constituents' opposition to Bill 11. They are e-mails and letters received from Cristini, Walker, Kohl, MacDonald, Scott, Lindeman, and Anderson.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings for the Assembly today. The first is correspondence written to myself from Janet Boulton of my constituency with the request that it be passed along to

the Premier. Janet, who has been afflicted with multiple sclerosis, writes stating her concerns, as someone who relies on the health care system, regarding Bill 11 and the encouragement of the privatization of our public health care system.

The second letter that I have five copies of for the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is correspondence from Carol Vander Well also of my constituency. This correspondence was copied to me and sent to the Premier, and it reads in part:

"Trust me", you said, as you reneged on your promise to give regions a morsel of self control through local elections of members of the regional health authority boards. You proclaimed you had to continue to appoint all the board members as the work to reform health care was not yet done. It is so very apparent now what additional controversial measures you had in mind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first one is a copy of my correspondence of even date to the Premier that I sent to him this morning requesting that he acknowledge that the two statements he made yesterday are false statements.

The second item is an invoice for \$21.19, which would be added to the total of costs incurred by the opposition around Bill 11, making that total \$29,361.97.

Finally, the very last item is an updated cost/benefit analysis which shows that the government has spent \$69,846 for each percentage point of Bill 11 support. The opposition has spent only \$497.66.

Thank you very much.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got the appropriate number of copies of a conference that I'm going to be taking part in in Medicine Hat called *Confronting Poverty: Making a Difference*. It's going to be held in Medicine Hat on May 5 and 6. It says: Taking Action for Stronger Communities.

1:50

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first are copies of the songs that were sung last night at the peaceful rally held in front of the Legislative Assembly.

The second is a copy of the letter from the mayor of the city of Edmonton to the Premier asking that Bill 11 be withdrawn.

The third is a copy of a letter from Mr. and Mrs. White regarding the fact that 24-hour blood pressure cuffs are not covered by Alberta health care.

The fourth is a submission to the Minister of Infrastructure from William Dascavich asking for answers to questions on Bill 11.

The fifth is a letter from Kay and Ross Gould to the Member for Calgary-North West asking for answers to their questions on Bill 11.

The sixth is a letter from Harold Moore to the Premier regarding donations to the Conservative Party.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an information brochure on a project that has as its community advisory committee Changing Together, the cultural brokers' network, the Vietnamese community, NorQuest College,

and Treaty 7 tribal council among others. The brochure is on A Study of the Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting TB Treatment and Prevention in Immigrant & Aboriginal Populations in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is on behalf of a Calgarian, Gina Djuff. She is very concerned about the strike at the *Calgary Herald*, and she would like to see a resolution to this strike.

The second tabling is quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. It is a top 10 list of movies in Alberta. Albertans who are not expressing their opinion on Bill 11 can sit in front of their television and, with the convenience of this, watch a movie.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly one of the province's great entrepreneurs. Many years ago he started from the ground up to build one of the largest restaurant chains in Canada. It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Walter Chan, president and CEO of Smitty's, and his friend Dale Richardson, who traveled from Calgary today to see the Legislature at work. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some 56 bright and active young students from the Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley. I have to say that I think they've brought more cameras with them today than any other group I've had in here. I really appreciate them. They're very nice young students. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Diane Orr, Mr. Bob Irwin, and Mr. Paul Vickers and parents and helpers Mrs. J. Hartt, Susan Hines, Monica Neilson, Catherine Belva, Donna McQuarrie, and Randall Lynch. I would ask that they rise now and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege and honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the balance of the Assembly 29 energetic students and teachers from Archbishop Jordan high school in Sherwood Park. Miss Yolande Joly and Audrey Gordey have done an excellent job of inspiring interest in the Legislature. I would ask that they rise and that the members of the Assembly welcome them as they stand.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the team handball players representing Team Alberta. They are from all over central Alberta, several from Strathcona county, and they will be representing Team Alberta in the upcoming national finals team handball competition in Sherbrooke, Quebec, on May 11. I know I speak on behalf of the Legislature when I wish you all the very best. They are accompanied by coaches Megan Henkelman and Ryan Hornbacher. I'd ask that they please now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first are Lesia Kozak and Evelyn Butler, two terrific

volunteers that offer their services to the Official Opposition on a regular basis. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is to welcome 25 guests from Parkallen elementary school from Edmonton-Riverview. We have students with us today from grade 6 accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Joseph Ewasiw, and parents Betty Rothwell, Karen Marlin, and Barbara Herrett. I would ask these students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I'd like to introduce to you and through you 33 young, energetic students from the Kneehill Christian school in the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency. These young students are accompanied by teachers Miss Terri Miller and Miss Raquel Toews and by parents Mr. and Mrs. Frank Isaac, Mr. and Mrs. Randy Reimer, Mr. and Mrs. Ches Toews, and Mr. and Mrs. Lorrin Baerg. I'd like to ask these visitors to rise and receive our warm welcome.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Rakhi Pancholi. She is a fourth year political science student, and this year she's going to be working on the politics because she is going to serve in the Edmonton-Centre constituency office as our summer student. I would ask Rakhi to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce two visitors to the Assembly. The first is Pat Cassady, who is my constituency manager in Edmonton-Meadowlark and who keeps the office running and without whom I would be very lost most of the time.

The second is Raechel Carpenter. She keeps us going. She will be a University of Alberta graduate in June of this year in political science. She is originally from Fort McMurray, and she will be helping Pat in keeping the constituency office going during the summertime. So if they can please rise and get the traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Closure on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has said that he has cut off elected representatives from speaking on Bill 11 because it's been the longest debate of any bill. The Premier says that 36 hours are more than enough to discuss the implications of legislation that undermines Albertans' and Canadians' most cherished and in fact unifying program, and that is medicare. Albertans want to know exactly what has been learned over the course of those 36 hours of debate, and we're hoping that the Premier might clarify some unanswered questions that remain. Where is the proof that his plan for private health care won't be more expensive?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this is again another manifestation of the kind of misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals and their new friends, the NDs, backed by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Alberta Federation of Labour, and the Friends of Medicare.

There is no plan for private medicare in this province. There is a plan, Mr. Speaker, to protect the health care system as we know it today. There is a plan to protect health care. That's what the plan is all about.

MRS. MacBETH: Still no answers.

Where is the proof that it won't lengthen waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, where has this hon. member been? You know, she seems to forget that when she was minister of health back in the early '90s she allowed 30 private surgical clinics to establish and to operate and to charge facility fees. Now it seems to me that she's saying that they didn't exist, that they've never existed before, that they've just existed in the last two or three months since the introduction of Bill 11, since the introduction of the policy.

Mr. Speaker, these clinics have existed for years and years. All we're doing now is attempting to put some rules and regulations around them, and they oppose that.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the proof that costs won't escalate as private facilities compete with public ones for a limited supply of health care professionals?

MR. KLEIN: I'll answer the question with a question, Mr. Speaker. What was the rationale back in 1990, when this leader of the Liberal opposition was then the minister of health in a Conservative government? What was the proof then and what was the rationale then to establish these clinics and to allow them not only to operate but also to allow them to charge facility fees?

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier open up excess capacity in public hospitals rather than siphon off public dollars to private health care?

MR. KLEIN: Again, we have a perfect example of the Liberals not reading the bill, not reading the policy. If they have read it, they are wilfully misrepresenting it, Mr. Speaker.

Relative to the section of the policy – I can't allude to the bill at this particular time – I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain it one more time, slowly.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, there is in the legislation before the House in the section dealing with the criteria that has to be considered under the awarding of contracts very specific reference to a regional health authority having to consider the existing capacity within the system and its utilization.

MRS. MacBETH: Why does this Premier refuse to stop the queue-jumping going on today through private MRIs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, much to the chagrin of the Liberal opposition the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness recently announced an increase in access relative to MRIs in public institutions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Private ones.

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. We announced just recently four more new MRIs in hospitals, and guess what? Guess what? Immediately the Liberals jumped up, and they said: how can you do this? If it's good, they don't like it. If it's bad, they do like it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't the Premier create one strong conflict of interest standard that will apply across the province rather than 17 different standards?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal opposition would help us with our policy and our legislation, they just might see that happen. Conflict of interest is indeed a matter of great concern for this government, and through legislation and through policy we are trying to address this as it relates to regional health authorities.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to both the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the regional health authorities we are working on improving and making more consistent their conflict of interest policies, but contrary to their inference there are conflict of interest policies in place now.

The other thing I have to indicate, Mr. Speaker, is that the premise on which the question was based initially is totally wrong. We announced four publicly funded MRIs for this province on both the capital side and the operational side to be operated directly under the regional health authorities.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier simply tell taxpayers today how much his communications plan for Bill 11 is costing them?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, up until March – and we haven't done the total calculation – it's about \$1.2 million, not the \$2.7 that was recently suggested, not the \$3 million that they threw out about two or three weeks ago.

MRS. MacBETH: How much was your ad on the weekend before you put in closure?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea how much the ad was, but, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you something about the ad. At least the ad told the truth, unlike this malicious piece of Liberal propaganda that says: understanding Bill 11, Klein's private hospital bill. There is no private hospitals bill before this Legislature. Never has been, never will be, and to put out that kind of advertising at taxpayers' expense is fraudulent. It's an absolute misuse of taxpayers' dollars, and they should be ashamed.

MRS. MacBETH: So where are the 30 censored pages that talk about focus groups and private hospitals policies that this Premier promised to give to Albertans 26 days ago? Where are they?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness indicated, that information is being compiled and will be tabled in this Legislature in the fullness of time. We have given an undertaking to table that information and it will be done, because this is a government that does what it says it's going to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Another broken promise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier's slogan for the next election going to change from "he kept his word" to "he broke the trust?"

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer that question. You know, our strategy leading into the 1993 campaign was to eliminate the deficit, to get this province on sound financial footing, and we did it. We did it. We overcame a \$3.4 billion deficit partially due to the negligence of the then minister of health to create a yearly annual surplus in excess of \$2 billion. To have a \$30 billion turnaround is absolutely remarkable.

Mr. Speaker, after we went through that era of reconstruction, of getting our finances in order, we went to the polls again. We went to the polls again, and guess what? We won again with an even larger majority. You know why that happened? Because the people trusted us. And they will trust us again.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: Well, that was sure exciting. I've certainly worked up a good appetite. If we keep this up, we might invite all of you to go down to Smitty's with me for something.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary regional health authority's conflict of interest policy, copies of which I tabled yesterday in this House, says that conflicts are avoided so long as medical officers aren't directly involved in decisions about contracts with private clinics in which they have an ownership involvement. This weak-kneed policy sets up a you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours scenario in which entrepreneurial doctors can be involved in making decisions about any medical contract other than their own. My questions are to the Premier. How can the government justify using the hammer of closure and end debate about how to effectively address conflicts of interest that arise when those in leadership positions financially benefit from contracts with regional health authorities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's quite obvious. I don't know where this hon. member has been. You know, maybe he's been spending too much time out on the steps of the Legislature with people singing songs and so on to get to the issue of the day. We want to get to the issue, and we want to have a vote on the amendment that specifically addresses conflict of interest, but these people across the way don't want to do it.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The College of Physicians and Surgeons does not allow doctors to own drugstores because this is deemed an inherent conflict of interest. Why does the government not impose a similar prohibition on physicians owning private, for-profit facilities that contract with the public system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain the situation to the hon. leader of the third party, but virtually every physician, not all physicians – those physicians who are staff doctors with hospitals, of course, have a special and unique position within the system, but those doctors who operate in their offices and operate also in the hospitals have a relationship with the RHAs. My God, if you prevented 4,000 doctors operating out of their offices from operating in the public system because they have a private business, there would be absolute chaos, chaos that even the MDs couldn't even attempt to undo.

DR. PANNU: My last question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: while

nurses who only earn a professional salary are not allowed to serve on RHA boards of directors, why are physicians allowed to hold senior administrative positions within RHAs while simultaneously holding financial interests in private clinics that contract with that RHA? Why this double standard, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I do not think – and I stand to be corrected, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement – that practising physicians or nurses who are engaged in a full-time practice are allowed to sit on regional health authorities. I stand to be corrected, but maybe the hon. minister can help me out with this.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is correct in that nurses practising with a particular RHA are not able to serve on that board, nor is a practising physician in that particular regional health authority.

Secondly, with respect to the Calgary regional health authority's conflict of interest policy, Mr. Speaker, it was clearly stated. One of the physicians that was involved as chief of staff declared his interests under that policy as provided for. It was known to the public, the people of Calgary, and to this point in time I have not had any charges made.

The most important thing, I think, to be recognized by the opposition, which they have not done thus far, is that Bill 11 further strengthens the whole area of openness of contracts, conflict of interest, but they don't want to debate it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

High-speed Internet Access

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our committee on lifelong learning, myself and two hon. members, from Wainwright and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, have been holding public consultations across the province. One of the needs we have heard is the local ability to access learning services. That means high-bandwidth connectivity. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What is the government plan for such high-bandwidth connectivity across our province? [interjections]

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can see that there's considerable interest in the House here.

We have recently concluded an RFP that was put out to provide high-bandwidth, high-speed access right across this province, and it's particularly important to the rural areas and small centres. That will enable them to offer educational services, health care, and all kinds of different advantages, both for the public and the private sector.

So the RFP has been put out. We received I believe it was 10 proposals, and we are now in the process of shortlisting those proposals. Once those proposals are shortlisted, we will have to go back to the shortlist for further information on their proposals, and once we have that information, then we will come to a decision.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the cost projection to the government and the end user, and if there is no such cost at this time, what is the process to estimate the costs, especially the costs to the end user? The question is to the same minister.

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

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I obviously haven't seen the proposals, so I can't comment on the costs of the various proposals, but I can say that as part of the RFP one of the issues is cost to the end user in small communities. Typically costs to end users in small communities are much higher actually than costs to end users in large centres like Calgary and Edmonton. So as part of this RFP we said that there had to be a postage stamp rate, that the cost to the end user in rural Alberta and small communities in Alberta had to be exactly the same or no more than the cost to the people in the large urban areas.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary question is to the same minister. From my technical knowledge I learned that the low-orbit satellite system is more cost effective than the fibre optics connection in rural areas in Alberta, so my question is: is there any consideration of using the satellite system for the high-bandwidth communication?

DR. TAYLOR: The member has more technical knowledge than I do in this area, I would readily admit, Mr. Speaker. Rather than specifying a type of technology, what we did was specify what we needed at the end. So for school jurisdictions we said 100 megabits, for hospitals 10. What we've done is specify the amount of bandwidth and the speed needed, and then it is up to the various proposals to provide that to the end user. That will certainly consist of some fibre optics, and it may consist of some wireless as well. As I say, it has to be 10 megabits to the schools and hospitals and 100 megabits to the jurisdictions and so on. So that's the way we're handling it.

2:20

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the province are speaking out against a closed-minded, bullheaded, and arrogant government that appears determined to ram through its private hospitals policy at any cost. Meanwhile, this Premier spends his evenings elsewhere, missing in action here.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Premier, with all due respect we can all recall that the last time a Premier decided not to listen to Albertans he ended up humiliated by a six-foot stuffed chicken. How many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out against the Premier's private health care policy before he accepts the responsibility of facing Albertans one on one: 50,000, 70,000, 100,000, 200,000? At what point do you blink?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, relative to the very rude, obnoxious preamble, I am not close-minded, nor are members of this Conservative caucus close-minded. We're not bullheaded. We're doing what is right: what is right in accordance with the requirements of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, what is right in accordance with the requirements of the federal government relative to compliance with the Canada Health Act.

With respect to the question, Mr. Speaker, we are listening, and we are doing what is right. We are trying to put rules and regulations around surgical facilities that have been in place for years, and for some reason the Liberals find something wrong with that.

I think it goes a lot deeper than that. I think it is politics. I think it is a matter, Mr. Speaker, of the Liberals wanting to drag this on as long as they can so they can prolong their vicious and malicious campaign of propaganda and misinformation.

MR. WICKMAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: just how many more health care petitions does the Premier have to receive before he has the moral fortitude to look Albertans in the eye and come clean with the real agenda behind his private hospitals policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite candidly, quite frankly, the real agenda behind the health care policy is protection of the public health care system as we know it today. It's as simple as that.

MR. WICKMAN: My last question, Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: why not simply do the honourable thing? Call an election, and let Albertans decide the future of health care in this province.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, how many times have I heard that in this Legislature, not only from this Liberal opposition, but from Grant Mitchell when he was the leader of the Liberal opposition? Whenever he didn't get his own way: call an election; call an election. Well, we finally called an election, and guess what? They got their butts whupped.

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

School Lunch Supervision

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are some 110 parent-operated school lunch programs currently in place in the Calgary board of education. These programs are for students who are not bused to school and otherwise need or want to stay at school for lunch. One hundred and ten schools represent about one-half of the schools in the system. An Alberta Labour Relations Board member has made a recommendation regarding whether certain lunchroom supervisors should be included in the Calgary Board of Education Staff Association bargaining unit. My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Could the minister advise the Assembly as to why the Labour Relations Board has become involved in this issue?

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

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The understanding I have is that within the Calgary public school system they had divided themselves into what are called collaborative learning communities, and I believe there are eight of them that cover these 110 schools that the hon. member made reference to. If I have my numbers correct, I think there are approximately 220 parents that really were involved in this lunch program, again as described by the hon. member. The Calgary Board of Education Staff Association looked at the situation, and they believed that the parents were being paid but were also being scheduled, so they made an application to the Labour Relations Board asking them to become involved in the situation and to make a determination as to whether or not these parents were in fact employees.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, since the board has become involved, could you advise as to what is happening now?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Upon receipt of the application the Labour Relations Board then made available a member of the board to try to effect a settlement between the parties to this issue; namely, the Calgary board of education, the Calgary Board of Education Staff Association, and of course the parents. There were a number of

meetings that were held. In the determination of those meetings there was going to be no agreement between the parties, so in fact with the authority that the board member was given, she has made a recommendation. In fact, to be technically correct, Mr. Speaker, she has made eight recommendations, one for each of these community areas. That recommendation, of course, is a sealed recommendation, and we are waiting determination from the parties.

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

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister is: how are you prepared to resolve this matter?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, of course, it's a delicate system, and there are other matters that are ongoing currently within the labour relations scene in Alberta where parties have asked me to get involved, even to the point of intervening. It is not the position of the minister of labour to intervene in this situation. In the situation that is involved today, everything is proceeding according to the act and its regulations. The minister at the appropriate time will be advised as to whether or not there is an agreement between the Calgary board of education and the staff association as it relates to this particular matter, and then we'll see where the next steps have to be, based on whether we have an agreement or not.

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

Bill 11 Publicity

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Official Opposition tabled an additional invoice bringing the total of our campaign to protect medicare – that's to protect medicare – and save democracy in Alberta to \$29,361.97. Unfortunately, the Premier's \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau and his 5 and a half billion dollar Ministry of Health and Wellness either can't add or are under strict instructions to put out deliberate misinformation about the costs of the government's massive propaganda campaign to sell its private health care policy. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier quit ducking and hiding and promise to release all of the invoices, all of the receipts, all of the contracts today so Albertans can find out just how much of their money has been spent on selling this government's private health care policy? Now. Not 10 months from now.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can stand before this Legislative Assembly and say that not one single penny, not one cent has been spent on any advertising campaign to sell a so-called private health policy. Not one penny.

MS OLSEN: Given that the Premier's \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau seems to have lost its pocket calculator, will the Premier just confirm this estimate prepared by the Official Opposition – that's the one that has been tabled here – which shows that the real cost of the taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign to privatize health in Alberta is over \$2.7 million to date?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I reiterate: not one single penny, not one single cent, not one nickel has been spent on promoting or advertising a private health care policy.

If the Liberals say that they've only spent somewhere around \$30,000, I will accept that, but what I won't accept is that they have spent that money to maliciously, purposely, and viciously mislead

the public, to put in advertising that there is somehow before this Legislature a private hospitals bill. It's wrong. It's misleading. It's an absolute abuse of taxpayer dollars. I don't know why they haven't been called on this, because it is blatantly false. It is blatantly untrue, it is blatantly fraudulent, and they continue to do it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I accept the fact that they have spent \$30,000 on a campaign of malicious misinformation, but they've been aided and abetted by millions and millions of dollars from the Canadian Union of Public Employees, by the Alberta Federation of Labour, by the United Nurses of Alberta, by the Alberta Teachers' Association, by the Friends of Medicare. Let's not let them fool the Alberta public. There has been a multimillion dollar campaign of misinformation relative to this bill, and the Liberals have been a big part of it.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can Albertans trust one word that this Premier says on health care when he hasn't got the courage to give taxpayers a true cost breakdown of the government's dismantling of public health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, they're yittering and yattering that they can't trust me. Well, I'll tell you, as I've told this Legislative Assembly before: they trusted us in 1993, the people trusted us in 1997, and they will trust us again when we go to the polls. Just wait and see. Wait and see.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Day Care

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Over the past few weeks a number of my constituents in the child care field have voiced their concern that the quality of day care is being eroded by the inability to recruit and retain trained staff. To the minister: could the minister tell child care workers around the province what is being done to address this very important issue?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am well aware of letters in the last few weeks that MLAs and others across the province may have received about the wage enhancement proposals that have been in front of day care operators.

As of April 1, '99, this Assembly would be aware that we put in a child subsidy program that took the subsidy for day care directly to the parent. It increased the amount of money that parents were able to receive for children, and it also provided an opportunity for parents to make the choice for family day homes.

Mr. Speaker, we have not been in the business of subsidizing businesses. Operating allowances directly to day cares has been contrary to the opportunity that parents have to make choices and deliberate where they themselves wish to have their children placed.

So although we're very sensitive to the issue that has been raised by a number of day care operators, we have evidence that we have ample numbers of workers that will take those positions. We also have evidence that the system where parents are receiving the moneys permits that choice and thereby in fact encourages the standards and day cares that are operating viably.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. There are a number of important issues affecting the quality of our provincial day care programs. Has the elimination of the day care operating allowance affected the ability of day care operators to appropriately compensate employees?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we do not directly intervene between employers and employees on the issues. However, we're well aware that retaining quality caregivers in day cares is an extremely important issue. We have met with representatives from the day cares. We are working with them to look at options that might be available.

As I've identified in this House previously, we have provided some \$371,000 to provide 50 hours for basic training to any person who wishes to be qualified to work in a day care. As a result, we are, at least at the admissions level, providing that support for tutorial. Beyond that, we're looking at an opportunity for these operators and groups, when they have collegially gelled on some of their issues and management, to come forward before the standing policy committee and discuss what the ways and means are that would best and most appropriately meet the needs of the day cares.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done by the government and by the minister's department today to assist child care workers in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, indirectly there's assistance provided as the child and family services authorities liaise with the day care operators in the examination and the licensure, in the inspection of day cares. There is significant opportunity for tutorial and advice being provided. In Calgary work done with the Calgary regional health authority and with the Calgary public school board as well as liaison with the university is examining the ways that we can provide assessment tools to families and to teachers and to day care operators in determining what is in the best interests of the child and looking individually at the child to determine whether or not it could be beneficial to provide them other supports.

So we are indirectly and with other partners, Mr. Speaker, through the children's initiative providing other supports to day care operators.

Bill 11 and the Democratic Process

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the current Prime Minister of Canada has used closure eight times since 1993. In stark contrast, this Premier has used closure 26 times since 1993. To the Acting Premier: why is this government so much more willing to stifle democracy and freedom of speech?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, democracy occurs every day in this Legislature in the afternoon and in the evening. The bill that's before the House that's been talked about for two months, plus a public discussion on policy for several months before that has received more debate at every stage to this point. When you cannot move off a definition amendment onto the substantive discussion of the bill in committee, I would suggest that taxpayers' money would be better spent in continuing the debate, which we are not doing in this Legislature in a meaningful way at this time.

Mr. Speaker, this is the place where the democratic process works.

Closure is a tool of this Legislature, a legitimate tool. The government will only use it when it is absolutely necessary, and that is the case now.

MS CARLSON: Closure is how this government defines democracy.

To the Acting Premier: given that the majority of Albertans believe in free votes, why won't the government allow its members a free vote on health care policy? Why won't you do that?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the members of the government caucus will have the opportunity to vote on this legislation, probably later today, as will the members of the opposition caucus. Frankly, I've not heard from any member of this caucus that they're uncomfortable with their voting ability and their opportunity to vote on this bill. They will, it will happen, and they'll vote freely.

MS CARLSON: To the Acting Premier: given that the Premier of Nova Scotia can go out and safely face thousands of citizens at their provincial parliament, what has this government done that the Premier is so afraid to face Albertans who gather at this Legislature?

2:40

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that question is in order for anyone other than the subject of the question to answer. However, I will say this. Every member of this government caucus has attended meetings either individually or in groups. They have received written submissions, they have talked on the telephone, and they have gathered all of the information that they possibly can on this subject. With that information and with facts that are in this bill, they will make their decision on how to vote.

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

Youth Employment

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rate of unemployment among youth is twice the national unemployment rate. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why is youth unemployment higher than that of other segments of the population?

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a complex issue. Generally speaking, it seems, as the member has pointed out, that the youth unemployment rate is always twice what the mainstream rate is. Of course, I can point out that in Alberta we have excellent youth employment rates, but our youth unemployment rate is still double our main rate. Basically, it is a lack of work opportunities. At times there is, of course, lack of knowledge and skills. The young people just haven't had enough time to develop some of the work skills that are required.

There's no question that we have a more challenging labour market, and there are some barriers that are preventing youth from getting into the workforce. One of those main barriers, by the way, is leaving school early, and as there are young people in the gallery today, I must encourage them to please, please complete high school and then to take a really good look at what my colleague to my right offers in terms of learning in the postsecondary education system.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister: what is this government doing to help Alberta youth overcome these barriers to employment?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, as I've indicated, we're trying to make sure and encourage young people that are currently in the school system to stay in the school system and graduate. For those that qualify we want to see them then move into the postsecondary system, and to that end my colleague the Minister of Learning and ourselves have a youth employment strategy.

I would highlight today, Mr. Speaker, for the hon. members our Youth Connections program. This program started out as a pilot project in both Edmonton and Calgary. It targets 16 to 24 year olds that are either unemployed or would be considered underemployed. The reason for calling it Youth Connections is that we're trying to connect young people to information and to resources that would allow them to explore career opportunities and interests and then allow them, of course, to connect with the workforce.

Now, Alberta is not only a great place to grow up, but it's a great place to work and to develop a career. Of course, it's our responsibility as a government to make sure that we have a climate where the private sector can continue to grow and prosper here in our province and thus create more and more opportunities for our young people.

MR. JOHNSON: My final question is to the same minister. For young people living outside the two major centres of Alberta, how can they become connected to youth employment services?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always risky when you interrupt a pilot project and start to react to it, but I can say with some assurance that the pilot projects in Calgary and Edmonton were working so well that we said: hey, we think this is a winner that we have here, so let's spread it across the province. So what we've done in our current business plan is increased the funding. Although I might be corrected on the numbers, I believe that we've now been able to extend Youth Connections to 23 other communities within the province, and I'm told that we are currently offering counseling, mentoring, and job shadowing opportunities to something like 28,000 young Albertans. We believe that this has been a tremendous success, and the feedback has just been excellent.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary regional health authority has contracts with 17 private surgical clinics performing over 12,000 insured procedures per year, but the Premier and his appointed CRHA board seem unwilling to release evidence to show whether Albertans receive any cost savings from the \$4.7 million in facility fees paid under contract to the private providers. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can the minister claim that his private health care policy will save money when he won't release the analysis prepared by the CRHA which evaluates the cost-effectiveness of contracted surgical services?

MR. JOHNSON: At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, as members of the Assembly well know, Alberta Health and Wellness has to follow the provisions of our current privacy legislation, legislation which all members of this House approved in this Assembly unanimously, as I recall, and we are following that particular legislation and the procedures and administrative action that follow from it. Therefore, the very specific details of these contracts is not public at this time.

However, should the opposition want to look at all of the very, very good features of Bill 11 and be more co-operative in getting

this very important legislation through this Assembly, there is a section in the legislation which provides for the openness of contracts and would be very satisfactory, evidently, to the hon. member across the way.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Will the minister confirm that he and his appointed CRHA chair are withholding the evidence from Albertans because it shows that there is actually no cost benefit to contracting surgical services to private providers?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister admit that his private health care policy has nothing to do with saving money or reducing waiting lists and everything to do with pressure from private providers to increase the volume and variety of contracted out surgical services in order to increase their profit margins?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. In the Capital region I have received no particular pressure from anybody about the alleged firms or groups that she's referring to.

The whole point of our legislation is to protect the public health care system in this province, as the bill is correctly entitled. Secondly, it is to provide for some options in terms of contracting, yes, for surgical services in this province under very strict controls in compliance with the Canada Health Act, and there are a number of provisions in the legislation dealing with the overall protection of the public health care system. That's the legislation which this government has put before this House and wishes to move ahead and get in place for the benefit of Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call on the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that accommodation. I'd like to introduce two constituents of mine from Calgary-Lougheed. They are John and Irmgard Silchmueller. They are very proud Albertans and very keen watchers of politics in Alberta. John is 69 today and is celebrating his birthday here. I'd ask that they rise – they're in the public gallery – and that we give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

2:50

head: Members' Statements

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

Holocaust Remembrance Day

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring attention to one of the world's greatest crimes imposed upon a people by people. Today, May 2, is Holocaust Remembrance Day,

a day in which all humanity is called upon to remember the senseless and systematic annihilation of 6 million innocent European Jews as well as millions of others during the Holocaust of World War II. Out of racism and hatred individuals and entire families perished by the deliberate actions of one's fellow human beings, a disgrace to humanity. The world will never know how many of the world's future leaders, peacemakers, doctors, scientists, writers, artists, mothers, fathers, and siblings died in the death camps.

While the Holocaust is a subject whose gravity may be obvious, we must never let ourselves become indifferent to it. We must use this day to serve as a reminder that we need to be accepting and respectful of others, the true cornerstones of a civilized society. We must dedicate ourselves to the memory of those who perished and continue educating our children about the perils of hatred and racism to ensure that such terrible crimes may never happen again.

I urge all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to pause today and reach out with understanding and compassion to our friends of the Jewish faith as well as all others who were persecuted during World War II. Perhaps we may never fully comprehend or understand your grief, but we extend to you our deepest sorrow and with it our perpetual and sincerest commitment to ensuring that such an event never again darkens the face of this Earth.

THE SPEAKER: To the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, thank you for that statement.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mental Health Week

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks the 49th anniversary of Mental Health Week in Canada. During those 49 years the issue of mental health has overcome the negative stigma that has been attached to it and is now widely recognized to be as important to our well-being as our physical health.

The theme of Mental Health Week this year is the workplace stress, with special emphasis on how it can throw each one of us off balance. Workplace stress affects not only our personal lives but also takes a heavy toll on the nation's economic balance sheets. The annual cost of work time lost to stress is approximately \$12 billion, and recent Canadian data suggests that work stress is considered by workers to be much more prevalent than work-related injuries or illness.

While mental health is an important issue for all of us, it is also important to recognize that there are many people among us who suffer from one type of mental problem or another. It is estimated that this year alone 9,000 Canadians will take their own lives or die from complications related to mental illness.

In the past governments resorted to hiding these people in large institutions away from major cities, but today we know better. Today we know that the best approach to mental health is one based on community mental health services. In Alberta 60 percent of mental health patients live within the community. The ability of these people to lead happy and productive lives rests upon the adequate funding of community-based mental health services.

Given these consequences, this government must do more to assist mental health patients through increased support for community-based programs. This year the government committed no new dollars to community mental health programs and has cut funding to several volunteer organizations in central Alberta. With this in mind I would like to know whether the Minister of Health and Wellness will commit to funding more comprehensive systems and community-based services in line with nationally endorsed best practices in mental health service reform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary-West Constituents

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I think it is very important to recognize personal achievements of our young people as they may well become leaders in the future. I am proud to recognize many special achievers in my constituency of Calgary-West.

Charissa Tomczak, a grade 10 student at Calgary Christian high school, very capably represented Calgary-West at Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament on April 13 and 14.

A special acknowledgment is due to seven young outstanding constituents who were nominated for the Alberta government's first Great Kids award: Hannah Bruins, Meaghan Dykema, Jackie de Graaf, Brent Kettles, Danielle Lee, Anne Madsen, and Elizabeth Stolte.

I am very pleased to also recognize 19 young athletes and two coaches from Calgary-West who competed with more than 2,000 of the best young Alberta athletes in the 2000 Alberta Winter Games. Congratulations for your skill, commitment, and sportsmanship: Kirsty Blair, cross-country skiing, silver and bronze medals; Lyndi Christofferson, shooting, air pistol; Jason Coke, speed skating, silver medal; Karen Coldham, figure skating, gold medal; Heather Fearon, diving; Kevin Handcock, archery; Matt Henley, biathlon, silver medal and two bronze medals; Amie Hickerty, hockey; Dallas Jones, diving; Andrea Longworth, diving; Eric Murray, speed skating, two gold medals; Kevin Sandau, cross-country skiing, silver medal; Michael Schleppe, archery, bronze medal; Todd Sullivan, alpine skiing, silver medal; Jeffrey Terner, alpine skiing; Wesley Thauvette, diving, silver medal; Jessica Tink, synchronized swimming, gold medal; Zane Westerbeek, speed skating, silver medal; Shannon Wilson, hockey; Donna Millar, coach, synchronized swimming; and Robin Sandau, coach, cross-country skiing.

Congratulations on your achievements. Enjoy the benefits of feeling increased pride in yourself, lasting friendships, and fond memories. I wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you to the three hon. members today for their statements.

Now, hon. Government House Leader, you caught my attention for two points of order. The first, please.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on my first point of order under *Beauchesne* 489 and 494 with reference to a tabling that was made by the hon. Opposition House Leader, where he tabled a letter that he purported to have sent earlier to the Premier. Certainly it's well within his right to write letters to the Premier and to table those letters in the House, but in tabling it, he made allegations and used statements – I think the words, if we checked the Blues, would be that the Premier had made “false statements.”

Quite frankly, I take objection to that. I believe it's unparliamentary and contrary to the rules; 489 indicates some expressions which have been ruled unparliamentary, and “false statement” is covered in that context. Of course, we know that statements can be parliamentary at some times and unparliamentary at others.

However, the other citation I gave, 494, indicates that it has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have had far too many occasions in this House where allegations are tossed back and forth. We've got out of the discussion of ideas and the debate on concepts and into the bismirching of character.

3:00

I think this is an opportunity for me to raise this issue because clearly the Premier indicated yesterday – and I'm not going to go over it, although I could. I have many quotes which could be used to justify the statement, but that was the subject of a point of order yesterday, and you ruled on that point of order yesterday. It is entirely inappropriate, in my humble submission, for the Opposition House Leader to then come in today and attempt to get back into that discussion, in effect to overrule your ruling of yesterday, and to make a statement which is contrary to parliamentary practice and contrary to the rules of this House, saying on the record that the Premier's statements were false.

In fact, I could go on, as I say, to indicate that those statements were not false. I would just want to indicate one occasion, again quoting from *Hansard*, page 1002, April 13, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora:

When we think there's enough support to defeat the package of amendments or at least this amendment, if they can't be further corrected, then I guess we'll allow it to get to a vote. But until then, I don't think any government member should be operating under the impression that debate will be swift on these government amendments.

Well, if that doesn't say that the opposition is going to stand in front of this bill and filibuster this bill until they get their way, if they think that's a democratic process, then I don't know what it does say. It says exactly that, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark went on record as saying:

We are going to be picking up on this particular amendment word by word, line by line if it takes us until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon. So that's what our plan is for tonight, and hopefully there's nobody in a rush here, because that's exactly what we are going to be doing.

Over and over again members from the opposition side have indicated that they are prepared to talk forever on this bill.

So to allude to that, to indicate that there are 14 references where the Liberal opposition has indicated that they're going to filibuster the bill, is absolutely correct and not a false statement. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, it is inappropriate for the member, in tabling his letter, to make that statement in a context when it can't be responded to, even as it might have been responded to in question period. It can't be responded to at all. It's a tabling. It's a bare-faced statement, and it can't go unchallenged.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition on this point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of points to make. Firstly, one looks at *Beauchesne* 486(2). It requires contextual consideration by the Speaker in terms of words that are used. It's a strong word, but yesterday, indeed, the Premier made two statements, and I reference the letter that in fact I tabled this afternoon. I did raise a point of order yesterday, and you heard from the Deputy Government House Leader. As a result, you disposed of it, as you were able to do, and therefore you became *functus officio*. You rendered your ruling, and that was fine in terms of the points of order.

We still have, however, the fact that the Premier of the province yesterday made a statement that was false. He was given an opportunity to show that it was correct. In fact, you may recall that

I challenged the representative of the government, the Deputy Government House Leader, to provide an example of any hon. colleague who had claimed that the opposition had undertaken a filibuster in regard to Bill 11. She could provide none. We are here 24 hours later, and there's still none.

What we have is this. You dealt with the point of order yesterday, and that exhausted your ability under the rules to provide redress. Therefore, I would respectfully submit that I'm entitled, as any member is entitled, to specifically request that a member do the right thing and acknowledge that what they said was false.

If we look at what the Premier said yesterday, he specifically said twice that the opposition had said certain things, said certain words. He was very, very specific about that. In fact, I'm suggesting that those were clearly false. All of the evidence says that they're false.

Now, I can't ask you to do anything further, Mr. Speaker. I did that yesterday, and you disposed of that. But as a member who is offended by those two false statements, which continue to be republished by the Premier both inside and outside this Chamber, surely I'm entitled to write to the Premier and point out that the appropriate thing for him to do is to acknowledge that those statements are false. He also made those announcements while the cameras were running in question period yesterday. That is highly prejudicial, and I didn't see the Government House Leader rise to his feet or even try to caution the Premier in terms of the kind of misstatement he was making.

So what have we got? I say that in the context my use of the words "false statement" is borne out by the evidence. If you look at the letter I tabled today – and I continue to challenge. If the Government House Leader can point out to me an example where one of my colleagues or this member said, as the Premier asserted, that the opposition is undertaking a filibuster – that's a very specific word; it means something very specific – if he can point that out to me, I will in a moment apologize and I will withdraw my characterization of the word false. His colleague didn't do it yesterday; he hasn't done it today. What am I left to conclude but that there is no evidence that the word filibuster was presented by one of my colleagues.

It's a significant matter. As I say, I'm happy to withdraw the word false if in fact the statements that the Premier made were accurate, but on all the evidence they were not accurate, the ones they've made, and there has still been no correction of that record. I would expect, Mr. Speaker, that you would be as concerned for accuracy of the record on both sides.

Those are the observations that I wanted to make with respect to this point of order. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I hesitated because I thought you might be prepared to rule.

The Government House Leader made allegations in attributing certain motivation to comments that I have made in this Assembly regarding the government's amendment package, and he read out a quote from *Hansard*, every word of which I stand by. He went on to then put words in my mouth, so to speak, by suggesting that my comments would somehow justify the Premier saying that the Official Opposition forced the government's hand to closure. That is wrong, and that is misleading, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader knows better.

As someone who has told me himself when we were both House leaders that he believes in debate, that he doesn't believe in closure, I understand how uncomfortable he must feel being the message

carrier on this and having been the one to be tapped on the shoulder by the Premier, I suppose, to introduce the closure procedure on Bill 11. But I don't think his discomfort with the role that he finds himself in is any excuse or any rationale for him to mischaracterize my remarks or to put words in my mouth or to suggest that somehow I have used any words at all that would justify the Premier mischaracterizing what is debate. As unrecognizable as that may be sometimes in this Chamber, what members of the Official Opposition have been doing is engaging the government in debate on a policy which we are fundamentally opposed to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, this point of order arises as a result of words that were uttered under one aspect of the Routine called tablings. The chair has provided ample comment in the past during this session with respect to tablings. We've now, in terms of this session, surpassed the record number of tablings by quite a quantum leap as to any other tablings before.

This parliament is rather unique in the sense that it does provide through its normal Routine in the early afternoon an opportunity for tabling. The tablings are to be tabled, the name of the subject matter identified and laid down. Every time hon. members decide to add adjectives or descriptions with respect to the comments, there seems to be items that arise from it. That causes quite a consternation, because oftentimes we're spending upwards of 10 minutes a day.

3:10

I repeat again that in most other parliaments there's a way of dealing with this, either by not having tablings permitted other than those which are statutory, which is the norm – in most parliaments only statutory tablings are permitted – or by having another time allocation in a different part of the day when the members can deal with that. If you have such a provision in place in here, then we won't have this kind of point of order, because no private members are then in a position to provide a tabling. That's one alternative to this dilemma, and it's an alternative that the hon. members of the House might want to consider. Periodically there will be a review of Standing Orders, and one might want to deal with that.

Secondly, a matter dealt with yesterday is not going to be raised again in this House today. It has been dealt with. It is not the tradition that once the House has made a decision, we reflect upon the decisions of the House. And there was a decision made with respect to it yesterday.

Thirdly, the use of the word false can be ruled parliamentary at some time and unparliamentary at another time, and much of it has to do with innuendo and suggestive statements and what have you. So what we have here is a situation where an hon. member rises today and says: "Well, an hon. member yesterday said, 'You're filibustering,' and I'm saying that I'm not filibustering, so that was a falsehood, and because you uttered a falsehood yesterday, I'm going to make the claim that you're now making false statements today."

The chair hasn't seen this letter that has been conveyed. Presumably it was tabled here today. The fact of the matter is that there's absolutely nothing inappropriate with the utilization of the word filibuster in this particular Assembly. If hon. members choose to use the word filibuster, they have the right to use the word filibuster. There's nothing wrong with that. If another hon. member feels that somebody else is not engaged in a filibuster, then the other hon. member can stand up as part of the debate and say: well, we're not into a filibuster. So what you've got here is a point of a difference of opinion.

There's been a great embarkation of debate in question period

which violates all of the rules in every parliament. This has been going on from day one. So if it's the decision of the House that they want to see it continue despite all the admonitions, it seems that we're going that way.

It will be interesting when there is finally a debate on this particular thing and a decision has been made in the House with respect to the matter. Should the decision be that a positive decision is made with this Bill 11 – the House will have made a decision. It would be difficult to see, starting tomorrow, if that happens, how questions could then be phrased admonishing the House for the decision that was made the day before. So once you carefully read the rules and understand that in preparation for what might happen in the future – but it's clear. If one wants to use the word closure, they can use the word closure. That's a parliamentary tool. If one wants to use the word filibuster, that's a parliamentary tool. It applies throughout. If someone says, "Well, it's false; we're not using a filibuster; in essence, we're getting down to debate," there's nothing that says it's unparliamentary to use the word false or falsehood. So much depends on the tone of the reading of it.

The hon. Government House Leader is absolutely correct that when used at a certain point in a tabling, there's no opportunity for any hon. member then to stand up and explain, defend, or deal with it. So I think that's a very unfortunate use of the word at the time because it does not allow another hon. member to rise on this point other than the way in which the hon. Government House Leader did, as a point of order, which is after the fact.

Perhaps the biggest problem is the provision of tablings. The chair will ask the House to review the current policy with respect to tablings, should there be a review of Standing Orders in the future.

Second point, the hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

MR. HANCOCK: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My second point of order is with respect to a reference made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford during his question. I'm rising under *Beauchesne* 289(3) and 409 obliquely. Under 289(3) there's an explicit reference to the fact that while members are called to duty in this House and are bound to attend,

the duties of Members have become extremely varied and Members must travel frequently. The discharge of those responsibilities will sometimes take a Member away from the House. This absence from the chamber should not be the subject of comment.

Over the last number of days, specifically today by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, there has been a serious and quite intentional abuse of the rule. I can understand when members slip from time to time, but when there's intentional abuse of a rule of that nature, I think it's time to call the House to order and call the particular member in this case to order.

Mr. Speaker, I absolutely have to concur with your comments with respect to the tabling of documents. Today there was tabled in this House a document called Bill 11 Top 10 Movie List. This was in the same context as the member's allusion to the Premier's absence. What the opposition have attempted to do through shouting things across, through innuendo, and through direct references, such as this member has made, to a member's absence, inappropriately and contrary to rule 289(3) of *Beauchesne*, is to refer to, I think – and if I'm wrong, I'd love to be corrected – a television comment that was made where the Premier indicated that he had seen a demonstration on television. There have been allusions in this House to the Premier watching a movie, and now they've tabled a piece of paper which has no bearing on what we're doing here. It's a self-created document. It's what we would call in the legal business a self-serving document. It's childish and it's a cheap trick.

What has been happening in this House and what I'm going to

continue to raise points of order on from now on, Mr. Speaker, is when we degenerate from debate on issues, from differences of opinion about concept into this inappropriate habit of intentional breaches of the rules, commenting on a member's absence in this case, and the degeneration into casting aspersion on our character, talking about being motivated by political contributions, those sorts of issues that have come up.

Now, on this specific point of order, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time to admonish all members of the House that intentional abuses of the rules will not be tolerated. The occasional slip by a member talking about someone leaving, that happens. The occasional breaches of the rules as we're in the passion of debate, that happens, but the intentional abuse of the rules in the manner that's mentioned in this case is inappropriate.

It's quite appropriate for the opposition members to do as they have been doing, call a standing vote on adjournment so that their attendance at a certain hour of the night can be recorded and then referred to publicly. That's an acceptable parliamentary tool to draw attention to the fact that some or all of their members are here at a particular period of time. That's great. I love to see them here and I love to see them do it, although it does take 10 minutes every time. But an intentional abuse of the rules such as this member has used this afternoon, in the context as well, I might say, of a totally inappropriate preamble to his question, should be ruled out of order, and the member should be called to account.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, did you want the hon. Opposition House Leader to speak on your behalf, or do you both want to?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I respect what the Government House Leader is saying and the reference he's making to *Beauchesne* and such. However, in this particular situation I would argue that the normal rules would not apply in that the Premier himself has on many, many occasions stated explicitly that debate will take place in this House. He's left the impression that he will participate in that debate, that we will have every opportunity to engage with him in that debate, and it hasn't happened.

I would not have raised that particular reference had the Premier agreed to debate in the public arena with the Leader of the Opposition, for example, which he's refused. The only alternative that we've been left with is to debate the health care reform here in the House, but with the Premier not being here to engage in that debate, it leaves us powerless. So I'm simply making reference to a statement. I'm simply making reference to a fact that the Premier has brought upon himself by his references. I would suggest that in this case the Government House Leader is not correct in his arguments.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just make these comments. I'd say that the Government House Leader stood on one point of order and gave some citation and then attempted, to my hearing, to roll two or three other matters into that. Let me deal specifically with the question, and that's ultimately what we have to deal with. We can spend a lot of time speculating on people's motives, on other plans, on other issues, but surely all we can deal with is what has been said in this Chamber.

If you look at the question, it specifically is focused not on the presence or absence of the Premier in this Assembly. The whole question is about thousands of Albertans, about people outside coming to the Assembly. I myself was in Calgary last night at McDougall Centre. There were over 100 Calgarians, and they wanted to hear from the Premier.

3:20

You know, the Premier may well have dozens of things in any given evening to attend, but surely we have not come to a point where in this place we cannot ask why the most senior elected person in this province is not meeting with people who are concerned about an issue. I'll read what I understand to be the question.

Hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the province are speaking out against a close-minded, bullheaded, and arrogant government that appears determined to ram through its private hospitals policy at any cost. [Meanwhile, the Premier is missing in action, spending his evenings elsewhere.] Mr. Premier, with all due respect . . .

I'm not sure I can read the rest of the wording, but the question is: "How many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out?"

Clearly, that's not talking about what's happening in this Chamber. It's about what's happening in that large public space outside this building. I mean, that's where the thousands of people are. We can only take 200 in here at a time. As I understand the question, it is: why the Premier wasn't at McDougall Centre to hear those Calgarians last night, as I was; why he wasn't outside on one of the nights when Calgarians were there. Now, he may have perfectly good reasons for why he's not there, but surely it's not improper to raise that matter and raise that question.

If you look at the citations that have been used, 289(3) – or the Government House Leader might have referred to 481(c) – that all refers to the absence or presence of members in this Chamber. I take it that the question is not about this Chamber. I take it that it's about being out and talking to Albertans who come. The Premier may have good reasons, but that's not a reason to rule on this point of order in a way that would be in any way supportive of what the Government House Leader is suggesting.

Those are the observations I wanted to make. If you look at the text of the questions, it is all about reaction to other Albertans, those severely ordinary Albertans the Premier talks about so much who don't have the privilege of sitting in one of the 83 chairs in this Chamber.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, let's deal with the actual text. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford says the following:

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the province are speaking out against a closed-minded, bullheaded, and arrogant government that appears determined to ram through its private hospitals policy at any cost. Meanwhile, this Premier spends his evenings elsewhere, missing in action here. Mr. Premier, with all due respect, we can all recall that the last time a Premier decided not to listen to Albertans he ended up humiliated by a six-foot stuffed chicken. Mr. Premier, how many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out against the Premier's private health care policy before he accepts the responsibility of facing Albertans one on one?

So presumably the question is:

How many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out against the Premier's private health care policy before he accepts the responsibility of facing Albertans one on one?

Previous to that it seemed to be a significant amount of preamble. But there is that statement again, and I use it again: "Meanwhile, this Premier spends his evenings elsewhere, missing in action here."

Hon. members, it's one of the basic, basic, basic statements that we don't refer to the absence of hon. members. I mean, of all the multitude of rules that we have in here one is not supposed to do that and one avoids doing it. Examples are perhaps important.

Yesterday afternoon during the question period it was noticed by

many that at the 13th minute in the question period a prominent member of the Assembly departed. Some members made interjections. At about the 45th minute of the question period another prominent member of the Assembly departed, and there was a whole series of interjections, including cluck-clucks, and somebody yelled out "chicken" and what have you.

Well, maybe there are reasons for people to have to go places. There are always reasons, and one of the reasons that we basically follow this tradition of not referring to the absence of a member at a particular time is that there are reasons. They may be very personal reasons, they may be very serious reasons, and they're not reasons that others should take to their advantage to try and humiliate somebody about. There are members missing in this House today because of sad situations in their families, very severe and sad situations. Now, for somebody to basically downplay that and denigrate that would be absolutely, I think, intolerable and totally discourteous.

I don't recall last night that there was a full House here, and I think right now 30 government members and six opposition members are in the House, and one independent member is in the House. I don't know if we should put that statement in here every 12 minutes, 23 minutes, 46 minutes, or what have you. In fact, one member of this Assembly has missed more days so far in this session, and it's not the person that most of you think it is. It is not the person that most of you think it is. But somebody is going to do something with respect to that one of these days, and they're going to be wrong, and they're going to embarrass themselves. There are reasons we don't do these things. They're courteous reasons, also traditional reasons.

I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is really proud of himself and his six-foot chicken, and maybe that was the point he was trying to make today, but he also knows better than what he said as well. I think he is an hon. member, and I think he can do better.

Thank you for raising the point of order.

head: Orders of the Day

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

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order. The chair would like to say that we have about a minute and a half, and we are going to have to report.

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

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole and just take a couple of brief moments to talk about some of the things that were specific in Bill 206. In second reading there was overall support for the spirit of the principles of the bill, and I'm happy that all hon. members took the bill at face value as a positive initiative for our schools and subsequently pledged their support.

There were a few comments made regarding the particular aspects of Bill 206 which I hope will be alleviated here in the committee. I believe the foundation for this bill is solid as it is a step towards

standardizing and clarifying the rules in Alberta schools, and there is a definite need for this to occur. Not all school boards have codes of conduct. Every single one of them has a policy on rules, but they're not all standardized, and that's why it is so important to have this bill brought forward.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair hesitates to interrupt, but the time for this item has now expired.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, we need a motion to rise and report.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm sorry. I would move that we rise and report. I didn't notice the hour, Madam Chairman.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 206 carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 206.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Cell Phone Use while Driving

508. Mr. Trynchy moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the results of the study undertaken by the provincial auto insurance Crown corporation of Quebec, Societe d'Assurance Automobile du Quebec, SAAQ, on the dangers of handheld cellular telephone use by drivers of motor vehicles and then consult with Albertans on whether and what restrictions should be imposed on the use of handheld cell phones by operators of motor vehicles while driving.

[Debate adjourned April 18: Mr. Cao speaking]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There were a couple of observations I wanted to make. You know, I applaud the member for bringing the motion forward. One of the interesting things about the job we have is that you get to talk to an awful lot of Albertans, and they tell you things that irritate them and they're bothered by and things they'd like to see remedied, and I'd have to say that this is a complaint I hear frequently: the use of handheld cell phones while people are operating motor vehicles in the province.

I've had the benefit of talking to some extent with the transportation critic for the opposition, and she's persuaded me that there's some actually very good material that exists and some studies that show that there appears to be a significantly higher risk of motor vehicle accidents that are attributable to the use of handheld cell phones.

I understand that there is some other work being done. I read an

article entitled Association between Cellular-Telephone Calls and Motor Vehicle Collisions, that appeared in volume 336, the February 13, 1997, issue, of *The New England Journal of Medicine*. I thought it made some compelling good sense, that this is something that has to be addressed.

You know, there are lots of causes of accidents. You don't have to spend very long on Crowchild Trail in Calgary or Macleod Trail, for those who live in the south of that city, to find what seems often one out of every three or four motorists operating a cell phone, I suppose as a kind of conceit; that is, we can operate the radio, the cell phone, put on makeup, check ourselves in the mirror, and do all of those things – we see people doing it all the time – and still be able to pay due care and attention to vehicles around us and hazards on the road and that sort of thing. So I think this is an issue that warrants some attention.

The motion has really two elements, I understand: one, to look at the Quebec study and then, secondly, to consult with Albertans on what sorts of restrictions ought to be imposed. I'd just make this observation. I don't disagree with anything in the motion, and in fact I'm going to vote for the motion. But why is it, Madam Speaker, that we'd be so anxious to consult with Albertans on handheld cell phones and we couldn't have public hearings on Bill 40, the Health Information Act, last year? We can't have public hearings on Bill 11, and we run like heck when anybody suggests a plebiscite. You know, at some point in this House don't we have to try and attach values to the things that we talk about?

This is not an argument for a moment in terms of why we should not consult with Albertans on this issue, but if there's such a thing as an objective observer of what goes on in this province, would that observer not be entitled to say, "Why is it that we're all set . . ." I can't presume what private members are going to do, but let's assume this passes, because I think it makes good sense, and I hope all members will support it. But if we were to pass it, how do we reconcile with the fact that we absolutely denied Albertans the right to be consulted on how their health information can be used, which is, I'd suggest, a vastly more important issue?

Madam Speaker, I see that somebody else wants to join the debate.

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

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HERARD: Madam Speaker, relevance. The hon. member while supporting the motion uses the opportunity to rattle on about things that were passed in this Legislature in the past – you know, that's over and done with – and things about Bill 11. I mean, it has to be relevant to what we're dealing with.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, my response to the point of order is simply this. We have an authority in this Legislature – and in a moment I'll find the specific time when it was used – that said that you have to allow a speaker an opportunity to develop a line of thought, and it's been acknowledged . . .

DR. TAYLOR: It's impossible to do, Gary, develop a line of thought.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I may be the worst example of trying to develop a coherent argument, and I may have distinguished myself by my inability to persuade, but, Madam Speaker, I think I'm entitled to use examples and illustrations and to be as creative as I

can to try and make a point in terms of why members ought to support or ask questions about it. You know, I'm happy to talk further about the relevance issue, but for somebody to stand up in the first three or four minutes of a member's speech and complain about relevance seems to me to be a bit worrisome.

In fact, I wonder what Calgary-Egmont is frightened of. What is he worried about? What is it about health information, that I should happen to choose that as an example . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Because it's been decided.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I acknowledge it has, but if he were paying more attention to what I was saying, Madam Speaker, he'd understand that I'm using an example, that I'm trying to hold up and give some bigger context to what we're dealing with on the motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: This Acting Speaker, as I know my other colleagues that sit in this chair do, allows a lot of latitude in this Assembly on all sides of the House, but we do have before us a motion that is a private member's motion dealing with cellular telephones. I would ask that we try to be succinct and we try to be relevant and we not try to be confrontational. Can we get on with the debate with the time that's left?

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, just to conclude my comments. I in fact was almost finished before the intervention. I suspect we've spent more time on the intervention than we have on the argument. [interjections] I'm not sure when I've seen so much rapt attention paid by members of this Assembly to one little motion, that I'm hopeful most members are going to support. It's fascinating to see. I'm looking forward to the vote.

I just wanted to finish making the observation that everything we do here ought to be able to fit into some kind of a coherent plan. There ought to be some kind of consistency to the way we vote and the bills we pass, and whether it's a private member's bill or a government public bill, is it unrealistic to expect that we be able as legislators to defend to constituents why we would have a public hearing in one case and in so many other cases we shun public hearings? I mark that observation. I'm still going to vote for the motion, but I think that as a legislator I'm entitled to make the query. Maybe some others will have the answer for it.

3:40

Maybe Calgary-Egmont has the answer why, if he's supporting Motion 508, this is something that we can go out and spend money on. We'll take out ads, and maybe we'll send the sponsor of the bill on a trip around the province. Maybe we could have a steering committee, a cell phone steering committee, hopefully that would always maintain close communication. We could send them traveling around the province to find out what Albertans are saying. Maybe at the same time they could solicit the views of Albertans on Bill C-6, on privacy protection in the private sector, something the minister of intergovernmental affairs has been doing some work on but not involving a lot of Albertans. Maybe we could seek some input on Bill 40, and maybe we could seek some input on Bill 11.

Those are my comments. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before the chair calls the vote, I will remind everyone that this afternoon is private members' business and we are dealing with a private member's motion. It is not a government motion. The chair just heard that we're talking about

consultation to do with government bills versus a private member's motion that is before us.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

Vehicle Front Licence Plates

509. Mr. Lougheed moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate the requirement to display front licence plates on all vehicles registered in the province.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to lead off discussion of Motion 509, the motion dealing with the reinstatement of front licence plates. This issue came to my attention six or seven years ago when I was invited to the Good Hope hall, a community hall just a few miles down the road in the rural part of Strathcona county. At that time Rural Crime Watch was holding a meeting, and they were discussing the issue of increased break-ins in the community in the rural area.

One of the topics of concern was the absence of front licence plates and the inability of the rural people to identify vehicles in their community. At that time there were probably over a 100 members of Rural Crime Watch there, and they were talking about several issues, including this issue of front licence plates. Bus drivers made comments about their concerns with respect to front plates, and several topics were discussed along those lines.

At that time I suggested that it might be a good idea to write a letter to their MLA, having no idea that a few years after that in fact I would be the recipient of several of those letters and many comments from Rural Crime Watch people in my community that I represent, to suggest to me that this would be a good thing to bring forward, and they still have those concerns. Those concerns have been clearly and consistently expressed over these past few years by these same people, the Rural Crime Watch associations throughout the province. They've been accompanied with rational arguments put forward by these members, stating that the reinstatement of front licence plates would be a good idea for several different reasons.

They include, for example, bus drivers concerned about the safety of the students disembarking or loading on their busses when exposed to the possibility of oncoming traffic or traffic from behind the bus not stopping for their flashing red lights and putting in danger those students that are getting off the bus, especially getting off rather than loading. When a bus driver observes a car coming from the rear passing him, he's able to pick up their rear licence plate, phone it in, and that driver of the car who failed to obey the flashing light signals has the opportunity to correct his behaviour by perhaps either getting a fine or else a warning from the RCMP about his behaviour.

However, when a car approaches from the front, it's really difficult for that bus driver to pick up the plate. He has to try and see it in the rearview mirror or try and look around through the window somehow and pick it up, and it's difficult for him to do so. So that person coming from the front does not have the opportunity to correct his behaviour and some day in the future, not recognizing the danger he's put the students in, may in fact clip one of those young people getting off the bus, and we'll have a death or a serious injury of some young person because of that.

Farm and acreage owners also express very often their concerns in their area when people drive into their lanes. When they see that somebody is home, instead of turning around and driving out, as all

our neighbours would do, these vehicles with people unknown in them back out. They'll back down sometimes quite a long lane to avoid having their rear licence plate seen, again an opportunity missed to report the vehicle. You can only report the vehicle and the type of vehicle it is but not some identifying number that it would have on its front plate.

It's possible those plates may be stolen, that the vehicle may in fact even be stolen, if these people are out there looking to break into rural community homes. That's also a benefit though. If the front plate in fact is stolen and that's reported and doesn't match the vehicle that it was attached to, that's another quick clue for the RCMP that something is amiss here and that they should be out there trying to find that person.

Actually, though, upon investigation we find the concern is much more widespread than just a rural issue. For example, all members and all Albertans are concerned about our wildlife and the situation in the green areas. We know about the situation of poachers backing onto fields or onto cutlines and thereby concealing their rear licence plate, and not having a front licence plate makes it more difficult for people driving by, wondering who that might be in the area and what they are up to. By just taking note of the front plate, they could report it, especially if they hear through the Rural Crime Watch phone lines or some other mechanism, their neighbours reporting some gunshots in the area out of season, that kind of thing, being able to report that these things are happening.

As well, rustlers in some of these areas driving pickups, pulling some trailer – the pickup rear licence plate is covered by the trailer, that may have some old plate on it that is no longer able to be identified, and who knows where it came from. That pickup licence plate being covered by the trailer offers a great deal of anonymity to that person out in that rural community.

Citizens on Patrol is another group, mostly an urban group, that also has expressed concern. One fellow just the other day from Citizens on Patrol in Fort Saskatchewan told me that he was driving by on duty one evening. He was going along, and a car tore out of a laneway. Just as he was coming about even to the laneway, the car turned and went the opposite direction to what he was driving, and of course he had no opportunity to pick up the rear plate. If the car coming out of the lane had its front plate on, he could have read it, identified the vehicle, and called that in right away.

Just this morning I glanced through my e-mail. I had an e-mail from another Citizens on Patrol person. He says here: I'd like to give you just one example. A couple of years ago I was on patrol and saw a small black Ford truck, a couple of young men. It was backed into an unused driveway. A day later we found out that a home was broken into about half a mile away from where the truck was. The culprits were never caught. This is one crime that may have been solved if we had front plates.

Block Parents have also expressed concerns. If front plates were there, it would give them an additional opportunity to identify the vehicles around their communities. Fish and game associations have also expressed concerns going along with those expressed by people concerned about poaching and the Report a Poacher program, those kinds of programs, people concerned about our wildlife. Conservation officers have also expressed the same concern. In fact, I did receive a letter from the conservation students at Lethbridge Community College stating that they fully supported the reinstatement of front licence plates. Last month or perhaps two months ago now the AAMDC voted at their annual meeting to move or push for reinstatement of front licence plates.

3:50

Urban as well as rural police forces are also interested in this

issue. This afternoon I tabled letters from the different police services throughout the province. The Edmonton and Calgary police services sent letters expressing that the single rear plate has made it more difficult for officers to identify stolen motor vehicles, and of course it's particularly true when an officer observes a vehicle in oncoming traffic that matches the general description of a suspicious vehicle. They tell me it can be difficult and unsafe for a police officer to try and read the rear licence plate of a vehicle as it travels by in the opposite direction.

The RCMP have also written a letter expressing support for reinstatement. They say, as a police force concerned about the safety of their clients, that there are many reasons to use two plates. For instance, they cite that front and rear plates would assist citizens who have witnessed a crime in identifying vehicles involved. The Medicine Hat Police Service recently contacted me seconding the RCMP and the Edmonton and Calgary police departments' position that front plates can assist in the identification of stolen vehicles or vehicles committing offences such as dangerous driving and speeding. Also, I received letters from the Lethbridge force and the Camrose force.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to tell you about a particular gentleman who contacted me regarding this issue. This gentleman is a retired detective from the Calgary Police Service with 30 years' experience specializing in fatal traffic accidents. He's testified many times in the field of fatal traffic accident investigation, and he knows what he's talking about. He tells me that in over 80 percent of all hit-and-run accidents the front licence plate, if it exists, is sheared off the front of the vehicle and left at the scene. As you can imagine, this information would greatly assist officers investigating the incident. It would save valuable officer time, tax dollars, and get that information into the hands of the enforcement agencies really quickly so that they would not be trying to find these vehicles. You can imagine the amount of time saved and the concern over those who were involved in that accident and perhaps even killed by a hit-and-run driver. For this reason and for suspicious vehicle identification, this expert in traffic accident investigation believes that front licence plates make a tremendous improvement to law enforcement effectiveness.

Madam Speaker, the majority of provinces in Canada use front licence plates. Most of the Canadian provinces and most of the states in the U.S. use a two-licence-plate system. These jurisdictions believe that the law enforcement benefits of having front licence plates are worth any associated extra cost, and I believe that Alberta should look carefully at these other jurisdictions and see what we can also learn from them.

I believe it's important to consider the experience of Manitoba. In 1987 as a cost-saving measure, much as happened here in Alberta in 1991, they adopted a single rear plate. A decade later, in 1997, they reinstated the front plate use. Their government states many reasons for this reversal, but primarily it was a law enforcement issue. Law enforcement agencies and rural crime watch groups highlighted the need to return to a dual-plate system. Manitoba decided that the extra cost would be well worth it for law enforcement agencies, and because the law enforcement agencies work for the citizens, certainly the citizens of that province also benefit.

According to the Department of Infrastructure here in Alberta, it's estimated that reintroducing a two-plate system would cost from \$1.7 million to \$4.5 million, and the amount would depend, to some extent, on whether the plates were reflectorized or not. It's based on about 2 and a half million vehicles requiring plates. That cost includes the cost of notification, replacement of a pair of plates, and the destruction of the single plates that would be turned in.

Many of the licence plates that are in use currently have deterio-

rated to a large extent, and they're soon going to have to be replaced. In fact, sometimes we see front plates on some vehicles and know that those plates have been on for quite a few years. In fact, these plates in Alberta have been the same since 1983, and that's a long time for a plate to be used, perhaps much longer than its intended life span, certainly longer than in most provinces, where they update the look of their plates every few years. Alberta's plates are going to have to be replaced soon. I think that we could use the opportunity to reinstate front plates when a new issue of plates occurs. That would certainly reduce the costs and reduce the inconvenience to Albertans.

Several people have written, once this issue was made known, that in 2005 we've got Alberta's centennial year, and they say that maybe that's a great time to bring in a new plate. I'd propose that if that's the time a new issue of plates is being brought in, it would be a good time to replace the old plates and institute front plates as well. This would give Albertans plenty of notice to prepare for any change that's coming.

Madam Speaker, support for reinstatement of front plates comes from a diverse range of stakeholders. Many petitions have been filed already, and there are many more to come over the next week before the expected vote on this motion in one week's time. They will be tabled in this Legislature. We appreciate the help of groups, especially Rural Crime Watch – and we have some of the members with us today – in getting that word out and getting the message to MLAs, especially in the rural areas, that that's of concern and that they would like to see the reinstatement occur.

We can help law enforcement agencies function at their best by reinstating the front plate, and if we do it when licence plates are replaced, it can be a cost-effective measure as well. The small problems that might be encountered with the reinstatement of front licence plates are insignificant considering the potential increase in security and the opportunity to identify stolen vehicles or suspicious persons in our community, whether it be a rural community or an urban community. This is a small cost to pay to improve the safety and well-being of our children and our communities.

Madam Speaker, I would urge the members of this Legislature to support this motion and to lend a hand to Alberta's law enforcement agencies by asking for the reinstatement of front licence plates.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before we continue, could I ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce members of the Rural Crime Watch Association that are here today to listen to the debate on Motion 509. They are Clark and Doris Steele and Lewis Compigla* and Deb Kurylo. Clark Steele has been with the Rural Crime Watch Association and a co-ordinator of the front licence plate initiative for a number of years. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

(*continued*)

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a couple of questions with respect to the motion. I'd start off by saying that this has not been a big issue in my constituency. I just finished sending out to constituents I think 27,000 copies of an annual report I do. It's mailed out, and I've got lots of response, lots of feedback from constituents on a range of things. I've not got any specific constituent feedback on this one.

4:00

The motion seems to make such eminent good sense. As a native Albertan I still remember when we eliminated the front licence plate. Was it just about cost? I understand the arguments in terms of hit-and-run drivers and school bus drivers. I mean, that all makes perfectly good sense. You know how I was saying before that what we do here should make some sense in a bigger picture? It must have been during the Getty years – I don't remember exactly; there'd be members who would remember – when this came out. I remember asking the question at the time: what does this do in terms of law enforcement? I didn't have the rapt attention of all these MLAs. I would have asked this question to maybe a co-worker or my family, but I remember asking the question: what's the price in terms of public safety and highway safety in deleting this thing? I never got a satisfactory response.

What I do remember reading and hearing at the time was people saying: "This is done in American states. We've checked with the police, and the police don't think this is a major safety issue." You know, I don't have the text of what I was told at the time, but I remember this being such an obvious question. It just seems to me there were all kinds of assurances from all kinds of different areas that this is no problem, that this is not going to in any way impede the work of law enforcement.

As I understand it, the RCMP – that would be K Division – now supports this. That's what I understood him to say, and he's got some kind of a letter or some kind of communication indicating that the Edmonton Police Service, the Calgary Police Service, and I think he said the Medicine Hat Police Service have all indicated that they support this. I don't know if those documents have been tabled in the Assembly. [interjection] Excellent. Okay. I haven't had a chance to look at those, but I'll be happy to look at those letters because I'm interested in seeing what they have to say about it.

Then I guess my other question is just in terms of the cost of this. As I understood the sponsor – and this is just what I heard, so I'm looking for some clarification – he said that the cost would be somewhere between \$1.7 million and, I thought I heard him say, \$4.5 million, depending on whether there's some luminescent properties or whatever in the licence plate. He said that that cost would also include notification of everybody who is a registered owner now and destruction of old plates, plates being turned in, and so on. I wasn't clear on what the cost was if we didn't go with the fancier licence plate, if we just went back to having a front licence plate which is really no different than the one I've got on the rear of my vehicles now. Is that the \$1.7 million? I don't know that.

I guess the question is: what's the cost thrown away? If we had until 1992 rear and front licence plates, as I'm advised, and we changed, I'm interested in what the estimate is of the taxpayer cost thrown away by having made that decision in 1992. Now, eight years later, really nothing has changed, I take it. We had lots of school buses on the road in 1992. We had police services who were anxious to monitor hit-and-run drivers and all that sort of thing. We had people in rural communities who were anxious to be able to identify vehicles in their area. I'm interested in knowing: what's the cost thrown away? I hope the member understands what I mean when I say that; in other words, in having gone from the system that

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

existed at that point to what would happen if we do this. I'd be interested in that sort of information.

Otherwise, as I say, I don't think I've gotten a single call in my constituency office on the issue, but I respect the fact that there are many Albertans who are concerned about this, particularly people in rural Alberta who have raised that concern. I follow that in the provincial media, so I respect that interest and that concern.

I am interested in some of the cost issues. I am interested in seeing the letters from the different police services that relate to this. I'm interested in terms of that time, and I have to go back – and I confess that I haven't had the chance to do this yet – to look at the *Hansard* at the time the decision was made. Now, I'm not sure whether that was the decision of the Legislative Assembly or whether that was just an administrative decision, done by regulation or whatever, to announce that we're not going to have these. I'm interested in seeing what the representations were that were made at the time, the defence of it.

I'm not sure who the minister was. The current minister of natural resources might have been the Solicitor General at the time. I'm just thinking back, and I'm interested in going back to see the comments he made at that time. I hope he'll be able to join in this debate, because he always speaks with such conviction about everything he does. I'd be interested in having him explain why he was convinced in 1992 that this was of no consequence and no problem to do and why it wouldn't compromise public safety.

Those are just some of the questions I've got. As I said before, my inclination is to support the motion, but I just have to understand how come we're doing this 180-degree turn in the space of just eight short years. There may be some other members who want to participate in the debate, but I might ask the sponsor of the motion if he's got some further information around the costing and particularly the cost thrown away. If he can make that available – and, I expect, not just to me – if that could be tabled in some fashion, I think that would help inform the debate.

Anyway, those are the questions I wanted to ask, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for your patience.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before we proceed, can I again ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

MR. LOUGHEED: Madam Speaker, a name was missed during the introductions before. At least I didn't hear the hon. member mention a lady who's done a great deal to help with the petitions, a lady who lives just east of the constituency I represent. Carol Marko is with us. I'd ask that she rise and be recognized by the Assembly for her hard work with respect to this issue.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

(*continued*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased today to have the opportunity to speak in support of Motion 509. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing this important concern forward. As my constituents and most of my colleagues here might know, I've been an advocate of the front licence plate reinstatement for some time now, and I'm most encouraged that this issue is now before us for debate.

Reissuing front licence plates has been in the media a fair bit in the last few days as more people voice their opinion on the potential benefits of this licence plate and the drawbacks of the lack of it. Only last month at the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties a motion was put forward by the reeve of Leduc county, Edward Chubocha, proposing the reinstatement of front licence plates. This motion was adopted by the AAMDC, and law enforcement officials subsequently expressed support for such an initiative.

Why bring back front licence plates, Madam Speaker? There are a variety of reasons. First, it would be easier for police officers to make a positive identification when a vehicle that matches the general description of a suspicious or stolen vehicle is seen in oncoming traffic. In this respect I contacted all four of the RCMP detachments in my constituency of Highwood and asked the officers there if they would support this motion, and they agreed. I asked if there were any officers in any of those detachments who would be opposed to it, and they said absolutely not.

Complaints have been raised with respect to vehicles which illegally pass school buses on the highway. Such infractions are serious as they pose a real danger to young children who cross the road when boarding or disembarking from the school bus. Many Rural Crime Watch groups have maintained that front licence plates would increase the opportunity to identify these vehicles. With that in mind, Madam Speaker, I again checked with the three different school divisions in my area – Christ the Redeemer school division, Foothills school division, and Livingstone Range school division – and in all three the transportation people that I spoke with support this motion and think it would be most valuable in their everyday lives.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association has been lobbying for the return of front licence plates for many years. This association represents over 60,000 Albertans involved in 110 local organizations. Again, I took the opportunity to contact our local range patrol, which covers a fair bit of Highwood, and they strongly support this motion and hope and urge that it be passed.

4:10

A third reason, Madam Speaker, for front licence plate use is a problem that has been experienced by many of my constituents who are on country residential acreages, farms, and ranches. A suspicious vehicle enters their private property, comes up the lane, the driver presumably detecting that someone is at home or out in the yard, and the vehicle backs away instead of coming in, leaving the property and avoiding identification. What are the people who are there to think except that they might have been a victim of burglary or worse? Anyone with lawful purpose coming into the lane would then be expected to continue on up to the house and speak to the people and maybe ask directions or explain their presence. When someone sees you and then backs out, the alarm bells ring. You can't do anything about it. Even with a pair of binoculars you can't spot a licence if it doesn't exist on the front.

Many of my rural constituents have spoken to me of their concerns about passing vehicles that are backed into a farm-field approach. They may belong to Rural Crime Watch or the range patrol, but the car or the truck or the van is backed in, and there appears to be no one there. When that rural resident knows that no one lives within a mile or two of the location where this vehicle has been parked front end out, they can only report that there is a suspicious vehicle or an unfamiliar vehicle at this spot, as was mentioned of course by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Without a front licence plate, all that local concerned citizens can report, then, is a

suspicious car or truck or van. I believe that positive identification would be much easier if vehicles were required to have a front licence plate. The end result would be that more criminals are apprehended, and rural Albertans would be safer.

Part of life in rural Alberta is when you're driving on a gravel road, it's a little bit muddy, and there's some moisture on the road. The back licence plate invariably gets obscured, but the front almost never does. Of course, we often see in the wintertime as well, on roads that aren't neatly plowed, that a lot of the snow comes up and sticks to the whole back end, again obscuring the back licence plate. There's no front licence plate and no such obstruction even if there was a front-end licence plate, so it is an important consideration.

As has been mentioned, there are concerns about livestock theft in the rural area. This indeed, Madam Speaker, as you know, is a much bigger problem in Alberta than many people realize. It's not just in the old Roy Rogers' movies that we have rustlers. There are lots of them now, and they're highly organized. In many instances pickup trucks pulling a stock trailer and large tractor trailer units are especially difficult to identify without front plates. Two plates would go a long way to identifying and perhaps leading to the punishment of perpetrators.

Rural Crime Watch groups, then, are organized because there is a genuine need for them. When someone lives in an area where the nearest police officer may be 30 or 40 miles away, those residents often do what they can to ensure the safety of their community, and I don't mean a vigilante squad. It's just an observation function that they do. This effort usually takes the form of identifying suspicious and unfamiliar vehicles as just a precautionary tactic. A front licence plate would make their valuable work that much more effective. They need every tool that we can give them.

Not only can front licence plates serve as a means of visually identifying a motor vehicle; the plates themselves may end up at the scene of an accident and thus serve as evidence, Madam Speaker. I've been told that in a significant percentage of hit-and-run accidents the front plate is sheared off. For a police officer investigating such a crime, the presence of such a piece of evidence would be invaluable.

As has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, urban police departments are very supportive of a return to the front licence plates as they would be beneficial to their police officers on patrol, not only from an identification point of view but also from a safety perspective. Two licence plates provide two chances at identification, and police officers feel that this alone speaks to the utility and value of returning the front licence plate to Alberta motor vehicles.

One of the keys to the debate on Motion 509 is balancing the costs of reinstating front licence plates with the benefits of public safety and law enforcement which could be achieved. There's no denying that there's a cost to returning to a two-plate system, Madam Speaker. However, as I will outline, this cost should not pose a barrier. Manitoba's experience with single rear licence plates began in 1987, but 10 years later that province returned to the two-plate system. As in Alberta, many of the voices speaking in support of this move included law enforcement agencies, Rural Crime Watch associations. While there's a cost in reinstatement, it is not substantial, equaling, apparently from the Manitoba example, about \$7 for a pair of licences or \$4 for a single plate. Similar costs, then, would likely result in Alberta. Surely such a small amount, only a few dollars in a onetime user fee, is worth ensuring that our streets and our children are safer. Remember that these licence plates are used for many years.

Madam Speaker, I want to see two licence plates on every vehicle in this province. As I stated earlier, I believe that there's a way to

make this motion before us even better. I believe that Motion 509 should be amended so that reinstatement would happen when a full licence plate reissue is made. This would allow time to complete studies on the effectiveness of front plates and would allow reinstatement to be accomplished in the most economical manner. I would like to propose, then, that we amend Motion 509 so that reinstatement would happen at the same time as the licence plate reissue. Although I'm certainly an advocate of front licence plate use, I believe there is a way we can do this while minimizing expense and hassle. Eventually we're going to have to do a wholesale transfer of licence plates in this province. Waiting for this change would be the most cost-effective and easiest way to put front plates back on Alberta vehicles.

I therefore move the following amendment, with the concurrence of the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I move that Motion 509 be amended by adding "in conjunction with a licence plate reissue" after the word "province." I believe all hon. members have received a copy.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's being distributed now.

MR. TANNAS: It would read:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate the requirement to display front licence plates on all vehicles registered in the province in conjunction with a licence plate reissue.

Madam Speaker, it only makes sense to wait until we have a full reissue. It may be in the year 2005, in Alberta's centennial year, that it might come about. There has been apparently some thought of a special licence being issued for that. If it can be done earlier, it would be a good time to reinstate the front licence plate. Also, many licence plates are currently in a state of severe disrepair and will have to be replaced whatever happens, whether it's in the year 2005 or much earlier.

There's considerable support for reinstatement in our constituencies. I believe, Madam Speaker, that this is not just a rural issue. It's an issue that affects law enforcement agencies across the province. Front plates are an important law enforcement tool, and I hope all of us are committed to putting them back on our vehicles. If we wait for a full reissue, then we can bring back the two-plate system with as few complications and as little expense as possible, without the need for reregistering all of the licences under the present licensing. I think this would be an ideal solution then.

Madam Speaker, I support the two-licence-plate system, and if Motion 509 is amended so that reinstatement will take place in conjunction with the full licence plate reissue, then I think it makes a good motion that much better.

Thank you.

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

4:20

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Speaking to the amendment to Motion 509, I was going to stand and support Motion 509 in its entirety. I totally agree with both speakers that have stood and spoken. I am a split urban/rural person. The fact is that my parents owned a school bus business, with a number of school buses. In 1992, while driving in the province and going on holidays, my mother, who is a past bus driver, always commented: how could bus drivers actually nab one of these people or write down the licence plate of a person who is going through when the red lights are flashing and students are already out of the bus and so on?

On Motion 509 all the different points that were actually brought

out are very good. The one thing I did highlight in here was the accommodation of new licence plates and when was it going to be. We are now on the amendment put forward. It is a public safety issue. The fact is that we did take this out in 1992. You know, I don't care how many people are going to deny it – we can go back into *Hansard* and go back to previous members speaking on why and whatever – but it was a cost savings. It was \$700,000 at the same time that there was a major shift in trying to save and react to the overspending over a few years and the bad times in Alberta during the 1980s.

I'm stressing the point that instead of waiting until 2005, we should be coming up with some mechanism to introduce the double licence plates right now. It is – and I'm going to stress over and over again – because of safety, and it is very, very important. I commend the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Until I saw this on the Order Paper, I wondered how this was ever going to come forward again. You know, why was it to the point where we were one of the very few provinces – and I don't think there are very many states, period. Wherever I've traveled in the United States, I've always seen double licence plates.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I believe that with the presentation of arguments or ideas brought forward by both the members for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and Highwood, the fact is that in the city we have the same concerns. I have a 95 percent rural constituency. I've heard this over and over again. I've heard it as I travel the province as the shadow critic for Municipal Affairs. Without even bringing it up to people when I drive through, this has actually been brought up in meetings. The majority of people that I know would be totally for this, and I thank the people that have come forward that were introduced in the members' gallery.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak in favour of the amendment to Motion 509 that would delay the reinstatement to coincide with the full licence plate reissue. I want to commend the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing forward Motion 509, the reinstatement of front licence plates on Alberta vehicles.

I'd like to begin by saying that this issue has been around and has been discussed many times since the removal of front plates in 1991.

DR. TAYLOR: Were you here in '91?

MR. FISCHER: Yes, I was, and I wasn't in favour then either.

The Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association has played an integral part in promoting and supporting the reinstatement of the front plates. I wish to commend Clark Steele, the provincial co-ordinator of the front licence plate initiative. He's a fellow citizen of the Wainwright community, and I'd like to commend him for his dedication and commitment to getting these plates back on Alberta vehicles.

I strongly support Motion 509 because I believe that anything we can do to assist the police forces in crime prevention is not only beneficial to our communities but contributes to the betterment of all our society. I think it's interesting that they took the front plate off. I mean, we see the front of the car just as often as we see the back of the car, and you make people run around now to the back of the car to see the licence plate. Well, maybe they should have made them run around to the front of the car. To me, by removing the licence

plate, it cut in half the opportunity to identify the vehicle. The front licence plate will definitely help with vehicle identification and could even assist in cases of reporting poachers, child abduction, hit-and-runs, theft of livestock, and instances of stalking. If the transition back to a two-plate system is delayed so that it can be accomplished in the most cost-effective manner possible, as was proposed by the hon. Member for Highwood, then all the better.

The front plate reinstatement is an issue that has generated great interest in my constituency, and I've had numerous constituents come to me with concerns like those already detailed by my colleagues from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and Highwood. These are people who have seen a vehicle quickly backing out of a driveway when they come to their front window. These are people whose children have almost been hit by vehicles that illegally pass school buses on the highway. These are people who have been victims of hit-and-run accidents who have no way of positively identifying the culprit. I've had constituents come to me with stories about witnessing poaching but being unable to get a look at the rear plate before the offenders realize they've been discovered and take off. I've even been told of people trespassing on posted land and backing into driveways and approaches to avoid having their licence plates noted.

In all of these cases a front licence plate would have substantially increased the possibility of identifying suspicious offending vehicles. By trying to positively identify these vehicles, people are doing what they can to keep our rural community safe, and that is what Motion 509 is all about: supporting community-based crime prevention.

If they say that they need the front plate, then I say that we give it to them, and, Mr. Speaker, they have asked for it. The Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association has been lobbying for the return of the front licence plate now for nine years. I was pleased to hear that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties decided at its convention this March to request the province to reinstate front licence plates. For years urban police departments throughout the province have declared their support for reinstatement. Their number one reason is that a front licence plate makes it so much easier to identify vehicles that are involved in or suspected of criminal activity.

Concerns about the lack of a front licence plate were even discussed at the spring meeting of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. I'd like to read you a quote from the letter from our assistant commissioner of K Division, Don McDermid.

From a police perspective, front and rear license plates would definitely be beneficial to officers when attempting to identify vehicles approaching them. Also, as a police force concerned about the safety of their clients, which for "K" Division are the residents of Alberta, front and rear license plates would assist citizens who have witnessed a crime in identifying vehicles involved with that crime.

The role of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is to enforce the laws made by our Federal and Provincial governments. The efforts made by the residents of this province to enhance the laws that would benefit any police force must be applauded.

Mr. Speaker, for years . . .

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

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 23
Apprenticeship and Industry Training
Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to

move second reading of Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000, standing in the name of my colleague the Minister of Learning.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system is known as one of the best in Canada and in fact many people would say the best in the world. One of the things that has made it very strong and continues to make it strong is the strong partnership between government and industry. The amendments in the bill that we have before us today grew out of discussions and consultations with key industry and labour organizations. It has the very broad support of these organizations, which represent hundreds and in some cases thousands of workers and employers in the province of Alberta. These discussions and these consultations have been ongoing since 1996, and the work that has culminated in this bill seeks to make the system more responsive to both employees and employers and, indeed, to the important subjects in this, the apprentices themselves.

Why the amendments in this bill, and what do they contain? The board certainly recognized that there were some specific problems being experienced with the description of some trades and is working with the provincial apprenticeship committees to look for solutions. These amendments will allow the board to address some of these problems. Amending the act will provide for the removal of program and process detail from regulation. This means that program standards will continue to reflect the needs and high standards of industry in Alberta, but the process will be less cumbersome.

We're also seeking to amend the act to provide for a competency-based certification program for designated occupations which brings the focus on individuals' competencies rather than on how these competencies were gained or acquired. This allows the board to be far more responsive to industries' needs, and it's consistent with Alberta's current labour market practices and workforce development strategies.

The bill also contains amendments that will strengthen local and provincial apprenticeship committees, the backbone of Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system, and provides the board the authority to establish or recognize industry advisory committees in addition to local and provincial apprenticeship committees.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would just say to hon. members that these amendments, as I have indicated, have the broad support of industry and employers and apprentices, I believe, in the province. These amendments will ensure that we continue to have industry as a strong partner, a strong player in Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system, the best in Canada. I would on behalf of my colleague ask all members to support Bill 23, as it will further improve our apprenticeship system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In rising this afternoon to enter the debate on Bill 23, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations for her remarks.

I certainly believe that in this province we are educating some of the finest tradespeople in the world. Albertans are working across this globe as we speak. Many of them are involved in trade-related work, not only as tradespeople but as supervisors. This in itself is a testament to our past apprenticeship programs.

Now, I can understand that there has been a lot of consultation involved in the drafting of this legislation. We're going back a few years now; 1996 I believe is when the first consultation started, and

it certainly continued with the discussion paper in January of 1998. The hon. minister and his staff I believe are to be congratulated for this consultation process. In my duty as a critic I circulated this bill, Bill 23, some time ago to various stakeholders across the province. They have reported back to me, some sooner than later, and they have mentioned to me the fine job that was done by the minister and officials from his department in discussing the bill, but I know there need to be changes.

I said earlier that I would be supportive of this legislation, but last week I had the opportunity to have extensive consultations with some individuals, and they brought some concerns forward regarding this bill which I hope are discussed at length in the debate on Bill 23. Perhaps by the time third reading comes around, I will be in full support of Bill 23.

This whole idea, Mr. Speaker, of implementing changes to the operation of the apprenticeship and industry training system in Alberta to make it more responsive to employers, employees, and apprentices is noted. The proposed changes redefine the governance provisions of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board. As the hon. minister said earlier, the entrance requirements for trades in some cases are going to be removed from regulation, and they're going to be added to the legislation. There are going to be changes made to competency testing, and I don't have any problem with this. Whether a baker learns to bake bread on the job and can pass the test that is provided by the government or whether the baker goes to, say, NAIT or to SAIT or some other recognized school, there are different streams of learning for everyone.

There are other members in this House, I for one, who were disappointed whenever there was a restriction or a limitation put on individuals who had life skills and life training who could challenge an exam. I was delighted to see the government bring that back, but I was not satisfied that in some cases it was a \$450 fee to write this exam if people are trying to improve themselves as a result of passing this test and earn a larger income. I think that was a good idea, but the high fee I was concerned about.

Now, we think of trades in this province, and there's quite a list of trades. Not everyone realizes that there are different kinds of trades. There are designated trades, and there are occupations. There is optional certification of trades, and there is compulsory certification of trades. Now, a cabinetmaker is an optional trade. Perhaps some people would call the Premier of Alberta a cabinetmaker. It could be.

We could look at compulsory certification trades. There's one that comes to mind of a great deal of interest to me, and that's welders. The welding trade is a compulsory trade. You can get a red seal from this province and you can practise this trade, after you test, in other provinces, in other countries. As industry changes and we become more sophisticated in our production of metals and their alloys, welding then becomes much more of an art. We're not just welding in a flat position. We may be welding in a tight spot; we may be welding overhead. You know, there are many, many, many different types of welders.

4:40

Now, a few of us say to ourselves: well, yes, this is true, but the province seems to be functioning very well; welders are doing a very good job in this province. But I would like to note that the Provincial Court of Alberta heard a case between the Crown and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. In October of 1996 near Swan Hills there was a significant release into the environment of a substance that causes adverse effects on humans and on wildlife. This release came from the flue gas stack off the transformer furnace at the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. The substances released included PCBs,

dioxins, and furans, and these substances are some of the most toxic known to mankind.

I heard an hon. member across the way say: what does this have to do with Bill 23? Well, the answer is quite simple. When the company, Chem-Security, made changes or repairs to the transformer furnace to repair the flue gas duct, a steel plate, a stainless steel plate in this case, was welded onto the furnace shell to refit the flue gas ducting. This steel plate developed holes in the welds around it, the plate failed, and this caused the PCBs, the dioxins, and the furans to escape, via the flue gas duct, into the surrounding environment, into the atmosphere.

Four mistakes occurred on the part of Chem-Security, and this is where having competent tradespeople comes into play. The first mistake was that there was no insulation placed over the steel plate to protect it from high temperatures. Now, I'm going to get into this in a minute in the Alberta welding regulations, but that was the first mistake.

The second mistake related to the lack of fusion on some of the welds. Lack of fusion, Mr. Speaker, occurs when the welding electrode melts but does not stick to the parent metal, or in this case the plate that it was intended to stick to.

The third mistake was weld cracking. Weld cracking can occur in certain grades of stainless steel as the weld cools and solidifies.

The fourth mistake was stress rupture or creep mechanism, as it's called in the trade. Stress rupture is a failure that occurs when materials are held under stress for a length of time at high temperature.

These mistakes resulted in the release of toxins and other poisons, and I have to remind hon. members of the cleanup that's going to go on up there someday in Swan Hills. As I understand it, incredibly the province is going to pick up the tab.

So we had faulty welding. We're talking about changes in Bill 23 here. We're talking about changes that, well, seem to be above-board, were done under a great deal of consultation, and they were. There are some very, very good aspects to this bill, but I'm thinking to myself: hold on here a minute. The welding repairs were certainly not done properly. Who did these repairs? Were the welders qualified? Who supervised them? Who tested them?

In Alberta regulation 135/94, or the Welder Trade Regulation as it's called, there are many tasks and activities and functions within the trade that occur "when practising or otherwise carrying out work in the trade." These are the words of the regulation, Mr. Speaker. One of these functions – and there are too many to list here – is "identifying metals and performing preparation and assembly tasks prior to welding." I'm thinking this wasn't done in Swan Hills, or we wouldn't have had this leak. Also, there's "sketching and interpreting blueprints." This was obviously not done, because if one could have a look at this blueprint, I'm sure it would say there that insulation goes on after all welding is complete. Or perhaps there's an inspection process, whether it be mag particle or whatever process would be used, to determine that there are no cracks in any of this welding.

We have to ask ourselves: were the workers doing repair work in Swan Hills capable of performing these functions? Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, these concerns are going to go unanswered as we debate Bill 23. It has been recognized that there was a failure to properly supervise and inspect the work. Not only was the welding faulty; the inspection process, as I said, was as well. Needless to say, my confidence in the repair job is not that great. This accident demonstrates, I believe, not only to all hon. members of this House but to all Albertans – particularly those many thousands and thousands of Albertans, as the hon. member has said, who are employed in the trades in this province – how important this bill is to their livelihood.

We will have a discussion here on this bill. Hopefully it will be a lively discussion, but we will determine whether this bill actually improves the delivery of apprenticeship programs in this province, because they have to remain sound. Now, this is why Bill 23, Mr. Speaker, is vital for the smooth operation of this province's economy, attracting and training apprenticeships in all trades and occupations, but also in supplying a skilled, competent workforce for the growing industrial base of this province.

Whenever we're discussing this bill and we see just what can go wrong in the welding trade, we should try to correct it, and would we be able to correct it with this bill? Unfortunately, we cannot even get to the bottom of this problem, because the judge in this case, Judge E.J. Walter, directed that all exhibits attached to this hearing be held with no access to the public, and at a date to be determined later, there would be a discussion or the whole issue of public access with respect to exhibits would be dealt with. Now, this is an unfortunate event, because as a result of this a person can't get a look at this blueprint to see what welding specs were required, what sort of training the welders were to have, what sort of inspection process was to be used. All these things are very necessary to the conduction of a skilled occupation. If you're going to conduct yourself as a skilled worker in this province, these are part of your training, and they were overlooked in this situation.

I'm not convinced as I go through this bill – and I've read it several times – that this incident would not occur again. We look at the tragic explosion in Calgary last summer at Hub Oil. As I understand it, there was repair work going on there. Were the workers qualified? When we look at the details of this bill and we look at the exceptions to compulsory certification trades, welding is a compulsory certification trade. What sort of exceptions were going on up in Swan Hills? What exactly was going on up there, and how are we to find out? Whenever exhibits are sealed, we don't have the opportunity to pursue this. When we look at section 22.1, to follow after section 22, and we're going to have exceptions to compulsory certification of tradespersons, well, this is why I'm questioning the direction of this bill.

We can carry on and go a little further. After section 23, what is going to happen with apprenticeship programs in regards to technical programs and standards, the documentation of the programs or the examinations? I would appreciate answers from the government on this.

4:50

Now, some ironworkers – and ironworkers are a compulsory trade – have some concerns about the repealing clauses that with respect to compulsory certification of trades will allow, as I understand it and as they understand it, the establishment of criteria that will allow an optional certification of a portion of that trade. [interjection] An hon. member said: well, what exactly does that mean? As I understand it, as it was explained to me, I can perhaps take a group of individuals off the street and, in the ironworker trade, just have them doing bolt up, assembling large components of, say, a steel bridge. All they would do is install bolts and tighten them up. Now, can we be confident in the structural integrity of the bridge after this would be done? I don't know. This is one example that has been given to me.

There are also the regulations in here. The Regulations Act is mentioned in here on several occasions, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has some observations on the use of the Regulations Act.

The hon. minister also said earlier in her remarks that there were other committees to be established, and I am questioning why these other committees are necessary in this act. Who are they going to

be? Why can't they work through the existing apprenticeship committees? Why can't they work within the existing structure? Why do we have to have other committees, and who are they going to report to? What is the reporting mechanism? Is this going to be done in secret? These are important questions.

The Regulations Act. Now, I found it here, Mr. Speaker, under the general responsibilities of the minister.

The Regulations Act does not apply in respect of any documentation prepared by or on behalf of the Minister relating to the carrying out of any functions [in this act].

Is this more secrecy in government? What happens? Do we certify a whole group as members or people who are qualified to work in a compulsory trade? Yet we're going to keep that information, because of this, from other industrial sectors.

There are lots and lots of questions that I have, and hopefully, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, by the time third reading comes around for this bill, I will be able to support it. Maybe my questions will be answered by the minister who introduced this bill or by other members, because certainly there are people who have familiarity with the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to join in the debate on second reading of Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. I will admit up front that my qualifications as a tradesperson are limited, but I think I can claim some genetic connection in that most of the other members of my family are involved in the trades, and I'm very proud of that. My father held five different tickets as a journeyman, both of my brothers are journeymen ironworkers, and another whole branch of the family are also involved in the ironworking union.

MR. MacDONALD: What trade certificates did your father hold?

MS BLAKEMAN: I'll check. I'll get back to you and list them and read them into the record, for the benefit of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Therefore, I take an interest in any legislation that is going to be amending and hopefully improving apprenticeship and industry training. I think there's a very large safety aspect that goes along with this that has to be used as a screen as we examine this or as a filter as we examine any changes that are being contemplated in this area, and that screen you have to use twice.

The first screen is about the health and safety of the worker. You know, in the trades they're working with heavy equipment. You can be working with substances that could be dangerous or toxic. You're working with, in some cases, building material which, if it falls or is installed improperly, can cause injury to the worker, and these injuries are lifelong. In many cases that's the end of their working career for a worker, and then we have them dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board, which, as a number of members in this Assembly have brought up, is a whole other kettle of fish. To me the important part of this legislation and other pieces of legislation like it is: is this going to uphold and secure health and safety for the worker?

The second filter that needs to be used around this is the health and safety of the public. It is equally important, and it is the second filter or screen that needs to be used when we look at any possible changes to this act. We are talking about things like bridges, which

can be a fairly minor bridge, but they can be fairly major. I mean, look at the High Level bridge in Edmonton. I for one want to know that every single bolt that's in that bridge is in there well and securely, that there is all of the necessary evaluation that needs to be done as to the qualifications of the person installing every bolt and nut and that that person has been supervised, and that all other technical requirements are being met there, because an industrial accident doesn't hurt just one person. It hurts many, many people, perhaps even thousands.

Just briefly, I'm thinking of that suspended bridge that was in a Hilton or a Hyatt or something in the States, and they were having a tea dance. It collapsed and came down on all of these people that were in the main rotunda of this hotel, and that was a structural problem. So we do have to consider the health and safety of the general population as a result of the actual building that's being used. Again, we're using building material which can be injurious to people, and this stuff is tricky to work with. I'm putting that forward at the beginning of my remarks to give a context for some of my concerns and questions that I'm raising in discussion on this bill.

I have a concern, and I'm looking to the sponsor of the bill or to others that might wish to address it. What I am reading in here – and I'm happy to be corrected on this, so I do invite debate from the members opposite. I am reading in here that there is a movement or an indication of a movement towards a de-skilling of the trade professions that are contemplated under this bill. I want to be sure about that, because I have talked about these health and safety issues, and on those two levels, both for the worker and for the general public, I think we all want to be assured that everything that is possible to be done is being done here.

There are some interesting complexities involved here, because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had mentioned that there are different streams of learning. Indeed I'm a big proponent of that, and here are a couple of examples.

5:00

When we were looking at making the occupation of midwifery legal, a recognized profession here in Alberta, it was important to me at the time to work along with those that were putting this into place, to make sure that there were a number of different streams by which someone could approach this profession, that it could be based on experience, tested experience but on experience. It could also be based on a university degree and sort of book learning or some combination of the two in order to achieve certification here.

I'm not going to say that every single person has to come through some sort of postsecondary education to achieve this, and indeed part of the long and honourable history of apprenticeship into the trades is that there isn't a postsecondary educational component to it. It has been apprenticeship. You go on the job. You work with a journeyman, and you learn the job from someone that knows it and with careful supervision. It is that time served and the actual hands-on experience of doing it that allows you to achieve that journeyman status. I'm looking for the reassurance around the de-skilling, but I'm also looking for what else is being contemplated here.

Now, the minister that introduced this bill talked about making it less cumbersome and alleviating some of the problems that have arisen in this bill. I'd like, please, to get an elucidation of what exactly were the problems that have been identified in this system. I'm struggling with this bill because there's a lot of vagueness in it, and I'm trying to figure out exactly what's being contemplated here. As a member of this Assembly I should be able to figure this out as well. So I'm looking for the specifics of what was it that was being

considered problematic in the existing legislation. What was it exactly that was being considered cumbersome in the existing legislation? So I look forward to the minister or the minister's designate being able to respond and detail the answer to that question.

The minister also spoke about this being a move to testing or certifying individual competence rather than how that competency was obtained. I've already talked about different streams, different ways to approach a level of competency, but I'm looking for specifically what's being addressed in this bill.

The other reason for my coming up to looking for why this bill is being changed is I'm wondering if there has been a gender analysis done on this. I'm interested in whether this is being contemplated with both eyes open to encouraging more women to enter the trades.

It was interesting. The other day I was at the annual general meeting for the YWCA. One of their main accomplishments has been a program in which the YWCA here in Edmonton had hired a journeyman carpenter who was a woman. She was training a number of other women to learn that trade of carpentry, and the number of successes they were able to detail for us at this annual general meeting as a result of initiating this program and having this one female journeyman carpenter involved in and running this program – I think the trades are a real avenue for a lot of women, and it's something that women are interested in, but it sure hasn't been an easy field to get into.

I'm thinking back to some of the restrictions that were in place that we have slowly discovered over the years weren't really about health and safety. It was about getting a certain kind of person into the job and precluding other kinds of people from the job. The one that springs to mind very quickly was that there used to be a height requirement for transit drivers. You know, did you really have to be more than six feet tall to drive that bus? No, you didn't. You had to have a certain amount of strength and agility and good eye/hand co-ordination and a number of other things, but the height requirement was not necessary. You could be much shorter than six feet and still hit the pedals and properly manage to drive that bus. So that requirement of six feet was not a fair one, and when it was removed, we ended up with a number of females qualifying for this.

So when I look at the principles, which, as I say, are vague, that are I think being set out in this Bill 23, I want to know whether there has been consideration here for inclusion or encouragement of women into these sectors. I've brought this up a number of times in budget debates and in other areas, asking what specifically this government is doing for women, and I'm told: oh, lots of stuff, lots of stuff. But then when I say: "I want to see it specifically. What exactly is the program? What exactly has been done here?" "Ah, well, hmm, ah." There's no specific answer from that. So here's an opportunity for the government to truly shine and stand up and tell us exactly why they have done this, and boy, I'd sure like to hear that something was going to be done to encourage more women into the trades. It's a great work opportunity, and if the women are qualified and if they can do the job properly – and I'm being clear here. I'm expecting that there would be no arbitrary and unreasonable barriers to that, but if they're qualified to it, boy, they should be doing it.

One of the other things that has concerned me aside from the de-skilling – when I see words like competency-based training, the red flags always go up. But as I say, I can think of other examples where that might be quite a reasonable and good idea. So I'm really looking for the detail on this.

The second thing I'm looking for is about access to information. It strikes me, as I've gone through this bill, that there's a lot of sort of: well, it'll be published in some magazine. But it's a running

theme with me, and I've often brought it up here, and I think it applies to this bill as well. This government can make it very difficult for people to access information on what legislation and particularly what regulations exist and particularly where there have been changes in regulations. The Regulations Act turns up over and over again in different clauses in this bill. How is someone, a tradesperson or someone considering a career in the trades, supposed to know about this? How are they supposed to figure it out? How are they supposed to know that there's been a change in this?

I have a real concern that there is a problem with access to information. Both now and particularly if this act passes into law, there would be a further problem with access to information. So I'm inviting members of the government to prove me wrong on that one, to detail how people are supposed to find out what's going on here, because that is not clear to me, and it should be clear to me. I'm an intelligent person with a university education. I'm a member of this Assembly. This should be clear to me when I read this legislation. There has been a commitment from this government to write plain language legislation and regulations, and this is striking me as very vague.

5:10

The third concern I'd like to raise as we consider Bill 23 in principle in second reading is the exceptions to the compulsory certification trades that are being raised. I won't go into detail here in a clause-by-clause consideration, because that of course is what we do in Committee of the Whole, but I get concerned when we start talking about exceptions. If we have a lot of exceptions to the rule, then I start saying: well, then what good was the main rule in the first place? Maybe that's what we should be looking at. So I want to know why that is happening.

That probably feeds back to the original question I was asking. What exactly are the problems? Could those be detailed? What exactly in this process is so cumbersome? But, boy, exceptions I think can be really problematic, because to me that starts signaling that there is more of a concern with the overriding principle or the guiding rules that one is working with.

So those were really the three sections that I wanted to raise: the de-skilling, the access to information, and the exceptions that are being put out. Those are the questions that I'm putting forward in second reading, and I do look forward to having a response from the government that would give me more information and answer the questions that I've put forward.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to participate in this debate, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you a visiting MLA from the Saskatchewan Party who I've gotten to know over the last two years. Her name is Arlene Jule, and she was instrumental in bringing forward the child prostitution legislation in Saskatchewan. She's here watching the proceedings, and I'd ask her to rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 23
Apprenticeship and Industry Training
Amendment Act, 2000
(continued)

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to speak on Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. I kind of look at this one with a little bit of interest and a lot of back history, because looking at some of the designated trades and occupations, I realize from my years of managing and running different companies and working for companies like Krupp industries, Great West Steel, Edmonton Wire, Metal Fab, and a number of other companies that a lot of these trades fit under what I used to supervise.

As I was listening to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations speak on this, she talked about having the best apprenticeship system there is. Well, I really believe that we still have a very good system, but we did have the best. We had fantastic trainers, educators that came over from Europe in the early 1950s and then again in the 1970s. We had a very, very good program.

I trained in some welding shops under some fantastic tradespeople. By any comparison, whether they were German, Dutch, Czechoslovakian, they were true tradespeople. They came over in the 1950s and were called displaced people. They arrived on the trains in Edmonton and were met by owners of companies like Edmonton Iron & Wire. A gentleman called Lou Gaul could speak seven different languages, and he met them and brought them to work for him. I went to work for him in the late 1960s and worked for a number of years before going back to NAIT to take drafting and then metallurgy and so on. So some of this all fits into place.

I have had a recognition of some failures that we did see in the early 1990s, and some of these things are coming back. We talked earlier about Motion 509 and what happened with the dropping of licence plates in the early 1990s. We see what happened to health. We were all narrowly focused on the fact that we had to control our expenditures.

We also went through the 1980s, and I got crippled just like anybody else in the 1980s with the up and down of the economy, running sheet metal companies, having my own, and watching as the industry fell when the price of oil fell and whatever. In the mid-1990s, prior to having my arm twisted and coming into this particular job, I actually had a number of sheet metal people working for me, plumbers, pipe fitters, and so on. I had trouble hiring people. I interviewed a lot of people before I brought them in to work for us, because, number one, you have to have your best people out there. Nothing is worse than sending somebody else back out to take care of a job that wasn't done properly.

You know, I want to point out a few things. As I talk to a lot of friends that are still in the steel industry and so on, we presently have a shortage of tradespeople in this province, a huge shortage. With all the work going on in Fort McMurray, all the steel fabricating shops where I'm still friends with the owners and so on are talking about how they're backlogged to the point where we were in the 1970s.

My job between '76 and late '78 was going throughout Canada inspecting welding shops, fabricating shops that could do work for us. I worked for Krupp, the largest steel fabricating shop in western Canada. In Alberta we were so backlogged with work that we couldn't even begin to do it here. We had to go to Montreal,

Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, all across. So I would go out and inspect the work that was happening.

After already being successful in quoting for the job in this province – I was in charge of a number of projects, Dow Chemical, Joffre. We had to meet deadlines, and we had to meet them at any point, so people did the fabricating for us. A lot of work came out of Toronto, where I got lots of work galvanized and shipped over. We did have the problems with CN strikes in those days and having to panic at the last minute and get work done on overtime and so on.

We're looking at a major problem of shortage of tradespeople right now. I do know that a number of job finders are out in Europe looking for tradespeople, trying to convince them to come to Alberta, the land of plenty, the land of lots of work right now, and hopefully they're successful. I believe that what is really at fault is the fact that we didn't recognize some of the problems that we were going to hit. If you always ride and budget and plan or not plan on the bad times – different times from 1982. Then '85 was a boom time, '88 was the low time, and in 1992 it started to climb again. Ups and downs. We have to really emphasize that we messed up on how our apprenticeship system went in the early and mid 1990s. Sure it was recognized by 1996, and the consultation started in 1996.

As I read it, several recommendations have been made to improve the apprenticeship and industry training system for employers, employees, and apprentices. Mr. Speaker, that is fine and dandy, but I really hope that we are going to work diligently and recognize how important tradespeople are to us in this province.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought up the different types of welding. Well, in welding, anywhere from the welders to B pressure to MIG, overhead bridges, stainless steel – every one of these people is under a red seal type of item. Their certification is compulsory, and they have to go beyond that to be able to challenge, to move on. Some people, because of actually being much better in the trade – I mean, it's like any other job, whether it's accountants, lawyers, or whatever. Those that are very competent move ahead a lot faster, and we cannot hold these people up. We have to be able to move them ahead.

5:20

You know, education in this province has to be recognized and pushed forward, so I am commending and supporting this bill but with some questions that we do have presently. I'm reading from a letter that the International Union of Operating Engineers, local 955, 955B, and 955C, wrote to us.

The fear is that competency based training will find its way into the apprenticeship trades. While there are some positives to competency training, it can, through abuse, lead to the breaking down of high standards that exist at present.

You know, there are some points to that.

Some form of qualifier, for example, written in the Act or in the Regulations that Level Three does not do Level Four work. In other words, we need protection of some sort that protects the Journeyman.

Then I look at different points of interest. Some of these stakeholders are concerned that regulations to be drafted that will tighten up the requirement of new competency training will not allow a high enough standard to be kept. It is absolutely essential that there are uniform standards to protect the professional reputation of current journeymen.

Listening to the minister and what was mentioned to us today, there has been broad support from the industry. Well, the broad support from the industry is in the fact that they didn't want the changes in the first place, and now that they're in desperate need to get trained people, they are going to be totally behind this. And, you know, let's commend the Ministry of Learning that something has

been recognized and that where we've been sitting for the last few years, in a void, has maybe been overcome, and we can move forward.

In phase 1 in the consultation back in October of 1997 six new actions in apprenticeship and industry training were proposed. More options for training: that was to open it up more and let a lot of the tradespeople have easier access to being trained.

Improved financial support for apprenticeship: a major item that was hurting bringing people into the apprenticeship system was when the financial support was actually cut. Who was going to actually hire somebody and then try to force them into getting the first year, second year, and so on apprenticeship, whether it's sheet metal, welding, and so on, if they're not getting some support? A lot of these individuals are young, married, supporting a family, and they just wouldn't leave. You know, if you tried to force them into the fact that you'd be setting them up to go to NAIT the next spring to take their six-week course, boy, you should have heard the excuses when that time came, whether they could afford or could not afford to be there.

Another item was increased promotion of ways to start an apprenticeship and recognizing prior learning. This is a case that we mentioned earlier on, and this is around life challenges. I believe that there are a lot of people who can jump the queue and actually do move ahead on this particular item.

Another item: more training opportunities for youth. Well, we have a case that I know of in my end of town. M.E. LaZerte high school for years was known as a high trades training program, and then with parents pushing to have more IB programs and so on, what happened in that particular school was the actual trades end of it got hurt. When a photography teacher is teaching welding and sheet metal, I do have my concerns with our public education system.

There are a lot of kids in my end of town whose parents are the blue-collar workers. There are the plumbers, welders, and that, and some of these young people are just not geared toward being university students or going into NAIT, especially with the requirements that they have. So we have to have more opportunities for youth whose abilities are more into the trades. It doesn't have to be in the red seal programs. There are lots of them that are optional. A lot of them are compulsory but do not have the red seals that young people can actually go into it. We should be looking at where we're going in the future.

Another item that I notice in here is increased options for certification of workers. Well, that is when you start getting the dual system, where you're getting ironworkers as well as boilermakers. Depending on the time, I've seen different changes in the economy in Alberta. I know I've run crews of 50 ironworkers, and all of a sudden that job is finished, and there is nothing. They go back onto the list, and they wait, and they wait. Then all of a sudden there's a boom in Fort McMurray, a shutdown in Fort McMurray, then they're up there.

Well, I really think that some of the proposals out of 1997 – and

this is going to be brought forward: increased options for certifications for workers. Some of these tradespeople are very, very capable of jumping from millwright to ironworker to boilermaker to whatever, and a lot of them have got the training.

Then I look at another item: strengthen industry advisory committee network. Well, I think this is what the whole bill is about. I really believe that we've got into a position where the industry says: well, we have to get with it, or the cost of not having these tradespeople with the booms that are happening right now – not only Fort McMurray, but we have the Fort Saskatchewan area, where Shell is going to be building. Within the next year in this immediate area I do know that all my friends who have steel companies are already booked and have enough work to go for the next six or eight months. So this is where the free market comes in. There will be more welding shops, but I've also seen a lot of them go under over the last few years.

In 1998 discussions were brought around asking for feedback from Albertans on proposals about a regulatory framework on apprenticeship and industry training and their viewpoints on proposed criteria for design of trades and challenges to designated occupations. As I read through this, there are some awfully good items that actually came out of this one too. Apprenticeship wages will remain in regulation unless changed or removed by the board in consultation with the application of the provincial apprenticeship committee. Now, we do know that there's been a complete sort of freeze on most increases in salaries over the last number of years. This is the result of the low points of our economy and the bust of our booms, but at the same time as we're looking at the peaks, I hope most of the people do realize that there will be more labour problems due to the fact that we're back into the other system.

Apprenticeship boards will ask the provincial apprenticeship committees to examine the need to regulate apprentice wage percentages in their particular trade if wage percentages pose a problem for certain sectors in the industry. We do know that that's going to be a major talk.

Results of this 1998 study: journeyman/apprentice ratios will remain in regulation; the norm will continue to be one journeyman to one apprentice. I hope that that actually does come about, because for an apprentice to have a journeyman that you can actually learn under in a shop, especially when you're getting up into pressure welding and so on – you actually have to have somebody with you all the time. It's something that was always compulsory, and I hope it comes back.

Some of the respondents to the consultation suggested that the ratios do not guarantee suitable supervision.

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. The Assembly now stands adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]