

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 14, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back.

I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who passed away since we were last in this Assembly.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

### **Dr. John Walter Grant MacEwan August 12, 1902, to June 15, 2000**

THE SPEAKER: Former member the Hon. Dr. John Walter Grant MacEwan passed away on Thursday, June 15, 2000. Dr. MacEwan was first elected as leader of the Liberal Party on November 1, 1958, and served until 1960. He was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the election held June 29, 1955, and served until June 18, 1959, representing the constituency of Calgary for the Liberal Party.

During his years in the Legislature Dr. MacEwan served on the select standing committees on Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; Public Accounts; Private Bills; Municipal Law; and Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education. Dr. MacEwan became Lieutenant Governor of Alberta on January 6, 1966, and served until July 2, 1974.

### **Eric Charles Musgreave July 21, 1921, to June 16, 2000**

THE SPEAKER: On Friday, June 16, 2000, Eric C. Musgreave passed away. Mr. Musgreave represented the constituency of Calgary-McKnight for the Progressive Conservative Party. He was first elected in the election held on March 26, 1975, and served until March 20, 1989.

During his years of service he served on the select standing committees on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act; Law and Regulations; Legislative Offices; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Private Bills; and during the 21st Legislature served as deputy chairman and served as chairman of Public Affairs. During the 18th Legislature Mr. Musgreave also served on the Special Committee on Surface Rights.

### **Bryce Coleman Stringam February 8, 1920, to June 2, 2000**

THE SPEAKER: On Friday, June 2, 2000, Mr. Bryce Stringam passed away. Mr. Stringam was first elected on June 29, 1955, and served until June 18, 1959, for the constituency of Bow Valley-Empress as an independent member.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Stringam served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Private Bills; Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; Public Accounts; and Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers

are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember the hon. members, Dr. Grant MacEwan, Mr. Eric Musgreave, and Mr. Bryce Stringam, as you have known them.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, it's now my pleasure to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join in in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

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

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

### **Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Brian Mason Member for Edmonton-Highlands**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I would now invite the hon. leader of the New Democrats to proceed to the bar of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands containing the results of the by-election that was conducted on June 12, 2000. The report states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands, and the said report further shows that Brian Mason was duly elected as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Sergeant-at-Arms.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Dr. Pannu escorted Mr. Mason to the Mace]

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Brian Mason, the new Member for Edmonton-Highlands, who has taken the oath as member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take his seat.

THE SPEAKER: Let the hon. member take his seat.

### **Presentation to the Assembly of Mrs. Mary Anne Jablonski Member for Red-Deer North**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I would now invite the hon. Premier to proceed to the bar of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have also received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Red Deer-North containing the results of the by-election conducted on September 25, 2000, which states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Red Deer-North. The said report further shows that Mary Anne Jablonski was duly elected as the Member for Red Deer-North.

Sergeant-at-Arms.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Klein escorted Mrs. Jablonski to the Mace]

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Mary Anne Jablonski, the new Member for Red Deer-North, who has

taken the oath as a member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take her seat.

THE SPEAKER: Let the hon. member take her seat.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Jorge Sobisch, governor of the province of Neuquen in Argentina, and his wife, Liliana Planas de Sobisch. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome also to Pedro Salvatore, the former governor of Neuquen, and to the other members of the governor's delegation who are seated in the members' gallery.

1:40

The governor and his delegation have come to our province to explore areas where Alberta and Neuquen can work together. The governor signed co-operation agreements this morning with the government of Alberta and yesterday with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. During his stay he'll also meet with Calgary business leaders and visit the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology. With our shared interests in oil and gas, education, agriculture, cattle, forestry, and paleontology there are a number of excellent opportunities for co-operation between Alberta and Neuquen. I'm looking forward to discussing these opportunities and to furthering the friendship between our two provinces when I meet with the governor later this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from citizens concerned with mature women's health and osteoporosis in particular. These are citizens of Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present today. The first is 1,060 signatures from individuals in Calgary and Lethbridge. This petition is asking that the Legislature pass a Tara McDonald law that will require two people on shift from dark to daylight.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is from 9,390 Albertans from Calgary, Lethbridge, Taber, a number of other points in southern Alberta, and from Edmonton, Leduc, High Prairie, and Fort McMurray. So you can see this one comes from a broad spectrum across the province. This one is also in connection with the employer's responsibility for employee safety, and it petitions the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight. Employers must be responsible for their employees' safety!

They are seeking to ask the Legislature to pass a Tara McDonald law to protect employees' lives.

Mr. Speaker, that's a total of 10,450 signatures from Albertans that are concerned about the safety of individuals working after hours.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that the sole written question appearing on today's Order Paper, that being Written Question 22, be addressed.

Tomorrow I will also be moving that written questions and motions for returns appearing on Wednesday's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I propose to present the following motion to the Assembly today at the conclusion of the daily business of the House. That motion says:

Be it resolved that the Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of this Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the government's mismanagement of the deregulation of electricity markets in Alberta resulting in inadequate supply to meet the rising demand and skyrocketing prices for consumers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that pursuant to Standing Order 40 I will move the following emergency resolution.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly, in light of skyrocketing electricity costs which are punishing consumers and disrupting the Alberta economy, urges the government to call an independent public inquiry into why the deregulation process has failed so badly and put all electricity deregulation on hold until the inquiry reports.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like today to provide five copies of a document entitled Working Alone Safely. I'd like to point out that this report has been prepared for Tara McDonald and other workers who have died or been injured on the job.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file a number of documents associated with the restructuring of the Alberta electricity industry. To start with, one is the independent Market Surveillance Administrator Report on Power Pool of Alberta Prices for summer 2000, released October 13, 2000. It tells Albertans about the record-high natural gas prices, high demand for electricity in other jurisdictions and at home, and other factors which led to rate increases in electricity last summer.

The second report I'd like to file, Mr. Speaker, is Alberta Connects, and that is appearing in a newspaper across Alberta this week. It tells Albertans about the government's proactive steps to shield Albertans from rising energy costs through the energy tax refund and electricity auction rebate.

The third item I'd like to file, Mr. Speaker, is the government's 10-point action plan announced on November 3, 2000. It will ensure a reliable electricity supply and competitive marketplace until the full benefits of restructuring are felt in the market.

The fourth item is the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission report of November 1, 2000, on California's wholesale electricity market structure. It identifies problems due to the rules under which trading takes place in the jurisdiction and offers suggestions for correcting them.

The fifth is the 10 electricity documents and brochures which reflect the government's diligent efforts to inform Albertans about how to make informed decisions in Alberta's competitive electricity marketplace. The documents, Mr. Speaker, are, one, Helping You Plug into Alberta's New Electric Industry; two, How to Shop for Electricity; three, Alberta's New Electric Industry, Opportunities for Small Industrial & Commercial Consumers; four, Alberta's New Electric Industry, Opportunities for Rural Electrification Associations; five, New Power Generation in Alberta, a guide to bringing new electric generation on stream; six, Power of Competition, a guide to Alberta's new competitive electric industry structure; seven, Power of Choice, a guide to help consumers better understand customer choice in Alberta's new restructured, competitive electricity industry; eight, A Vision for Alberta's Electric Industry, Looking Ahead to 2005; nine, Generation of Electric Power from Solution Gas Otherwise Flared; and a fact sheet about Alberta's electrical industry.

I would like to also table two letters of October 15 and November 9, 2000, from Mr. John Davies of the Lethbridge Iron Works Company Limited raising some concerns about electricity deregulation, which are being addressed through the government's 10-point plan.

Finally, the Industrial Association of Southern Alberta letter of November 4, 2000, commends the government for allowing industries to bid on unsold power purchase arrangements and for the 10-point plan.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table six copies each of three reports that I've brought forward today, the second quarter reports showing the results of the Alberta economy. The first is the fiscal update, the second is the activity report for the second quarter, and the third is the heritage fund second quarter report. This report, again, puts in place the 4 and a half billion dollar debt payment in the province of Alberta, which will release and bring down our interest payments to \$700 million. It also ensures within there priority spending that will be discussed here during this session as well as a return to Albertans of some \$485 million through tax concessions, rebates, and property tax reductions, Alberta crop insurance premiums for farmer reductions. Of course, starting on January 1 a reduction to 10 and a half percent single rate of tax will see another 190,000 Albertans off the tax rolls to go along with the 1 million tax filers in the province of Alberta that don't pay any provincial income tax.

1:50

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rather than the hidden agenda which this government has about more two-tiered health care in Alberta, I want to share with Albertans a preview of the first bill that we will present to this Legislature as the government that we will form after the next provincial election. There's a clear commitment in this bill to repeal and scrap Bill 11 and replace it with legislation that truly protects and strengthens and sustains our public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is a document published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy entitled Flat and Dual Tax Plans Not Likely to Have the Desired Effect on the Tax System or the Economy.

The second document I'm pleased to table is the latest report on the question on this MLA's web site; 12,712 people responded. Absolutely nobody thought Alberta should proceed with deregulation, 62 percent of the respondents thought it was important to freeze the process until we take steps to better protect the consumer, and 38 percent felt Alberta should return to a regulated electrical utility system.

Thanks very much.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is from a senior in Calgary who has written to me about the effect rising rent and utility increases have on her and her husband's ability to live on a fixed income. They are receiving AISH and Canada pension plan.

My second tabling is copies of a profile piece entitled Painting Peace, which I received at the youth forum held by the government in Edmonton and other communities last week. It profiles a poster project that is being conducted in partnership by people from Alberta, Change for Children, which is an Edmonton-based organization, and groups in El Salvador and Nicaragua. They are attempting to draw attention through their art to issues of human rights, social justice, peace, and sustainable development.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon. It's a letter from the federal Minister of Health to the provincial minister of health indicating that the practice of insured persons purchasing medically necessary MRI services is a Canada Health Act concern which can result in queue-jumping not only for this service but for follow-up treatment in the public health system.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a letter from an Edmonton ophthalmologist. The letter was written October 1 to the Minister of Health and Wellness and protests the decision of the minister to approve the expansion of contracting out of cataract surgeries in the Capital health region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of Sharing Knowledge, Shaping the Future, an occasional publication of the Alberta Graduate Council, indicating that tuition in Alberta has risen over 208 percent since 1990 and that Alberta is near the bottom of the list in provincial funding of postsecondary students.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of copies of a letter that I received from Versacold. This is a company that has operations in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge. They are very concerned that their electric bill has gone from \$2.7 million to over \$5.5 million, and they're afraid that the so-called Alberta advantage no longer exists in this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as required by section 35(1.1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, I table in the House a list of the registered candidates for the Edmonton-Highlands by-election of June 12, 2000, together with their chief financial officers, who failed to file a financial statement with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer on or before October 12, 2000. This report is submitted pursuant to section 35(1.1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

As well, pursuant to section 44(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-22.1 of the 1991 *Statutes of Alberta*, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner. This report covers the period April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000.

I'm also pleased to table copies of the financial statements as at March 31, 1999, of the office of the Ethics Commissioner. A copy of these reports was distributed to members on October 30, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to the Assembly on your behalf the family of the late former member Mr. Bryce Stringam. His daughter Mrs. Ann Tingle is accompanied by Mr. Morgan Tingle, grandson. They are seated in your gallery, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a very dedicated, hardworking woman from Lethbridge. Her name is Deb Dore. For the information of all of the people here in the Assembly Deb is the mother of Tara Anne McDonald. It is through her efforts and, I think, her efforts alone that the Working Alone Safely examination was undertaken, which culminated in the reports that were filed earlier today. So I'd ask Deb Dore to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and to other members of the Assembly the council of the M.D. of Greenview: a very special person and a very visionary reeve, Tony Yelenik; his fellow councillors Wayne Drysdale, Charlie Cramer; and the CEO of Greenview, Gordon Frank. They're seated in the members' and public galleries, and I'd ask them now to rise and receive the usual warm and cordial welcome of this Assembly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a wonderful group of young people from the Independent Order of Foresters Youth Club in Calgary. Through IOOF these young people are getting to see the

value and the importance of community involvement and community service. They've all been involved in some form of community service or another. They raised funds throughout the summer so that they could visit us here in the Legislature and see the various sights around the city. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask you to join me in offering them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you a group of grade 6 students from Grasmere school in Alberta Beach. They're here to study the workings of the Legislature. I made a commitment to them that when they get back home to write me a letter, which I'll respond to, and tell me what they thought and ask the questions that they have no answers for. They're seated in the public gallery. They're here with their teacher, Mrs. Sharon Hansen; the bus driver, Jim Hansen; and some parents. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: That's very nice, hon. member, but you forgot to introduce the most important person in your life, your very distinguished wife, the honourable Mrs. Lorraine Trynchy, who happens to be sitting in the Speaker's gallery.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, she advised me not to introduce her. She wanted you to do it, so thank you.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Robert David Jablonski. Mr. Jablonski is the owner of a fibreglass manufacturing company in Red Deer. He's the proud father of three children and the proud grandfather of one granddaughter, but more importantly he's the proud husband of my new colleague for Red Deer-North, who has joined us in the Assembly today. I would ask Mr. Jablonski to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly somebody that has been very special in my life for the last 14 years as a secretary and one most dedicated and loyal individual in my constituency, both in Vermillion-Viking and Vermillion-Lloydminster. Mrs. Lynne Little has served with distinction. Perhaps we don't have too much longer to serve together, but I wanted to take this opportunity publicly to thank her for that tremendous work. Would you please stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly and a thanks for dedication to democracy.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three introductions to do today. The first is a group of students, 72 of them, from Bertha Kennedy school in my constituency. They're here with their teachers, Miss Michelle Terrasi, Mrs. Fiona McManus, Mrs. Colleen Diedrichs, and parent helpers Mrs. Sheryl Lobsinger, Mrs. Marie Waters, Mrs. Sandy Deleeuw, Mr. Ron Kreski, Mrs. Karen Fowler, Mrs. Susan Manchak, and Mr. Charles Tutty. They, I believe, are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

I also have the introduction of a group of students who are in the education program at Yellowhead Tribal Council. They are people here from the Sunchild reserve, the Alexander and Enoch bands, and they are here with their director, Anna Demchuk. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the next group is about to come in, and I won't have an opportunity to introduce them after. So if I may, I would like to introduce 56 students from Archbishop MacDonald high school, and they are here with their teachers, Mrs. Jane Warren and Mrs. Phyllis Schumacher. They will read their introduction in *Hansard*, and they are looking forward to a great question period.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 45 students and five adults from Fraser elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. Accompanying the two grade 6 classes are their teachers, Mr. Dennis Hennig and Mr. Hiob. The parents accompanying them are Mrs. Steel, Mrs. Robinson, and Staff Sergeant Ewatski. Staff Sergeant Ewatski also doubles as their DARE instructor, and he just came back from instructing a DARE program in New Brunswick. They're going to be in the public gallery just as I speak, and with your permission I'd like them to be introduced and welcomed to the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and to all members of the Assembly two individuals who represent the community of mobility disability. The major disability, of course, is that they are not mobile. In spite of their own disability, being in wheelchairs, Donna Martyn and Larry Pempeit are examples of persons with disabilities who spend numerous hours in encouraging and inspiring others to make Alberta a better place to live for all of us and advocating on behalf of those Albertans who suffer from this disability. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask all members of the Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all my new colleagues in the Legislative Assembly three very important people in my life. They are my wife, Kärin Olson; my father, Robert Mason; and my stepmother, Kay Guthrie. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a lady that has worked very hard in my constituency office for the last seven and a half years in Taber. She is seated in the members' gallery. I would like Angela Wolgen to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

## Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the spring session of this Legislature this Premier rammed through private health care legislation despite being opposed by the majority of Albertans, who will be living with the consequences of that legislation for years to come unless, of course, there is a change in government. In much the same way, five years ago this Premier rammed through his electricity deregulation scheme over the voices of opposition from both inside and outside this Legislature. Albertans are now living with the consequences of higher prices and threatened supply. On May 12, 1999, this Premier said, and I quote, that competition in electricity markets always means lower prices for consumers, end quote. My question is: why did this Premier deliberately misinform Albertans when he said that prices would go down under his deregulation scheme when in fact they have risen and will continue to rise for the foreseeable future?

MR. KLEIN: Well, you know, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is living in two futures. One will never come to fruition, and that is the future of a Liberal government in this province. It will never happen. That's one future. She's also living in another future that hasn't arrived yet. She's living in the future of a deregulated electricity environment. It has not happened. We are still, as we sit here today in this Legislative Assembly, under a regulated environment, and the price of electricity is going up. Under a deregulated scenario when those 1,400 megawatts of power come onstream, when there's additional transportation capacity, the prices will come down.

Mr. Speaker, this hon. member, the leader of the Liberal opposition, I'm sure is a proponent of competitiveness, of free enterprise. If she's not, then stand up and say so now. Tell all Albertans. Is she a socialist, or is she a free enterpriser? If she's a free enterpriser, then she will agree wholeheartedly with our plan to bring about competition and fair pricing in the electrical market scenario.

If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants to know more factual information, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: I think that's okay, sir. We've now spent three minutes on that one.

Supplemental, please.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, there's no competition when three producers are protected.

What plan does this government have to deal with the anger that Alberta consumers are feeling towards this government over rising prices, whether they be residential, commercial, or industrial users?

MR. KLEIN: We have done as no other jurisdiction has done. We have put in place relative to rising gasoline and home heating fuel costs a \$300 rebate. Now, Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert . . . [interjections] Well, you can't help but hear her.

Talking about this rebate, I asked her very politely: if she doesn't like the rebate, will she return it? She says: "No. I'm going to spend it." Right? A \$300 rebate, Mr. Speaker. Twenty dollars per month will come off everyone's electricity bill starting January 1. Plus almost \$800 million has gone to businesses, farm communities, schools, hospitals, institutions to help offset the rising cost of electricity.

That, Mr. Speaker, is what we have done. We have done more than any other jurisdiction perhaps in North America, and they don't like it. They don't like it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that a key component of the Alberta advantage is access to cheap, reliable electricity supply, why is this Premier squandering this key benefit to Alberta citizens and businesses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the statement made by the leader of the Liberal opposition relative to “cheap” couldn’t be further from the truth. That is false, false, false, false. That is a false statement, because the price of electricity throughout North America, throughout the world is at an all-time high. This is not a situation that is peculiar to Alberta.

If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants some facts, some real facts rather than pulling cheap political rhetoric, I’ll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the whole issue of electrical deregulation and pricing, I think it’s only fair to Albertans that we clarify the issue of some of the processes that are in place. For example, when deregulation kicks in starting January 1, 2001 – 85 percent of the people connected to the Alberta electrical system are residential and residential farm consumers. That’s over 1 million people. Those individuals will not have to make any changes for up to five years. They will remain under the regulated system. That’s 1 million residents who will remain under the regulated system for five years. In addition to that, they’ll have a choice if they want to change.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister, for that brief supplemental to that.

Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Klein electricity program – and actually interestingly it can be shortened to the KEP – comes into effect in 47 days, but already Albertans know that they have fewer dollars in their jeans as a result. Wholesale prices for electricity have risen from an average of \$14 per megawatt hour in 1996, before the KEP, to \$118 per megawatt hour so far this year, in 2000. My question is to the Premier. What guarantee can the Premier give that this eightfold increase won’t be passed on to consumers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the leader of the Liberal opposition is living in the future, and she’s talking about something that has not yet occurred. These price increases have all occurred over the past year in a totally one hundred percent regulated environment. I would ask this leader of the Liberal opposition to be honest with Albertans and tell them that we are still in a regulated environment. Quite clearly and very deliberately and very maliciously, I might add, this leader of the Liberal opposition is trying to imply that we are in a deregulated environment at this particular point and that deregulation, which has not occurred, is somehow contributing to rising electricity prices. I will say again just to set the record straight and to be truthful that we are in a regulated environment as I speak today, and the price of electricity is going up under a regulated environment.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that Albertans are facing higher electricity prices today because of his own bungling and mismanagement that led to uncertainty in the marketplace and a resultant short supply of power today?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. There has been no bungling on my part or on the part of the former minister of energy or the current

Minister of Resource Development. I would invite the leader of the Liberal opposition to talk to the president of TransAlta Utilities. [interjections] Well, any other utility. Right here in the city of Edmonton I would invite the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition to state to the president of EPCOR, a good Edmonton company whereby the city of Edmonton reaps the profits under a regulated environment, and any of those people, the experts – we’re not talking about people in the Liberal caucus because they sure are not experts; we’re talking about experts in the electricity industry – will tell the hon. member about the anomalies that are now taking place that are contributing to an increase in power rates under a regulated environment.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the cost of producing power remains virtually identical to the cost in the pre-KEP days yet the wholesale selling price has increased eightfold, can this Premier explain to this House and to Albertans how his electricity scheme has allowed this exorbitant overcharging for our power to occur?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there has been an examination of this particular matter. It was done by the market surveillance administrator. The hon. Minister of Resource Development tabled his report today. I would invite the leader of the Liberal opposition to read that report, and she might learn something from that report as to what is really contributing to high power rates not only in Alberta but indeed in virtually every jurisdiction on the North American continent and perhaps throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll have the hon. minister supplement if he wishes.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the power rates and natural gas rates to the consumer we did a review of the November 1999 to April 2000 natural gas and electricity rates and found that the average rate on a monthly bill in Alberta was \$151. During November 2000 to April 2001 we’re expecting that price to go up to \$251 per month, but when you consider the rebates provided at this time – they amount to \$100. Therefore, the bill actually will be less this coming winter to the consumer out there than it was last year.

Now, we’ve always said that we’ll keep monitoring the situation and making adjustments accordingly.

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

2:20

### Private MRI Clinics

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, Mr. Speaker, we’ve got lots more questions on electricity, but since the Premier appears to be shorting out, we’ll switch topics here.

Last May the Premier . . . [interjections] They’re touchy. We know it.

Last May, Mr. Speaker, the Premier wouldn’t admit that it was possible to jump the queue in Alberta by paying for a medically necessary MRI at a private clinic. My questions are back to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that one of his first acts as Premier of this province was to approve and introduce and allow private MRI clinics?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I’m going to put it right back across the alley. The first private MRI clinic that was licensed in this province was licensed by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health.

MRS. MacBETH: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: The name of that clinic was Elliott Fong Wallace, EFW Radiology. Mr. Speaker, this leader of the Liberal opposition was the person who licensed the very first private MRI clinic in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, either this Premier isn't telling the truth or his former minister isn't, because MRI clinics were not in operation in this province prior to May of 1993.

THE SPEAKER: I've recognized a point of order. We'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion of question period. Right now the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor to deal with a supplemental to her third question.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that he has in fact shortchanged the public system in order to create a climate where Albertans are either forced to or can go to a private MRI clinic and jump the queue for medical treatment in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond, but before I do that, I want to point out that this province leads all other provinces in Canada in terms of publicly funded MRIs. We now have seven in hospitals. Six more are on their way. And, yes, private MRIs are used under very special circumstances to even further alleviate waiting lists.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this Legislative Assembly is steeped in history, and one of the historical notes that I wish to point out is that this desk was previously occupied by the former minister of health who is now the Leader of the Opposition. I find many things in this desk from time to time. I quote from *Hansard*, July 2, 1992, page 1746.

The private sector does in fact have a role if it can prove that it is efficient, that it's operating fairly, and that it's meeting the responsibility of our health sector to provide access to health services.

Not my words, the words of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, we have done tremendous things with respect to MRIs. As the Premier indicated, we have seven MRIs in the public system currently. We are bringing six more on board. We will have the highest per capita capacity in MRIs in this country. Those are publicly funded.

Two years ago, Mr. Speaker, we did 23,000 MRIs in this province. Last year we did approximately 30,000 MRIs. This year we are projected to do over 40,000 MRIs. I might point out that this was with no help from the federal government. This is a contribution made by this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the records in fact showing that prior to May of 1993 there were no private MRI clinics in this province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, will this Premier confirm that he plans to do nothing to stop the queue-jumping and the two-tiered health care already in place in this province right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the documentation with me. Whether they were up and running or not is a very moot point. The fact is that the first private MRI to be licensed in this province was licensed by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health.

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

### Cataract Surgery

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is hell-bent on privatizing the health care system. You can't pass legislation which encourages the growth of private clinics and private hospitals run for profit and expect to maintain a universal, single-tier health care system for very long. Two tier is here. My questions are to the Premier. Why does the government refuse to accept the advice of Edmonton ophthalmologists who are urging better use of existing operating theatres at the Royal Alex eye centre and who oppose public funds being wasted on contracts with private eye clinics?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness elaborate, but jurisdictions are quite different relative to how they treat various kinds of procedures, including ophthalmology procedures. I understand that about 70 percent of cataract removals in the city of Edmonton are done in public hospitals, about 30 percent are privately contracted. In Calgary I believe 100 percent are privately contracted. In other jurisdictions there's again a mixture of private contracts and cataracts done in public facilities.

I'll have the hon. minister go into further detail.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, two tier is not here, and if it doesn't fit, you better quit. That label does not fit the description of the provincial health care system that exists within this province today.

Our Health Care Protection Act specifically says that it prohibits private hospitals. The leader of the third party indicated that we were creating the environment for it. The fact is that these contracts are privately delivered but paid for by the public system. It is a public system that is privately delivered through contracts with regional health authorities. If you add up the sum total of all of those contracts, it comes to about \$50 million.\* That is roughly one-sixteenth of 1 percent of our \$5.8 billion budget. We have a public health care system in this province.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier again: how can the Premier justify breaching section 8(b)(iv) of his own private health care law by allowing additional cataract eye surgery to be contracted out in the Capital health region given the unused capacity of the public Royal Alex eye centre? Answer that.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, I will answer that. Mr. Speaker, although we differ tremendously philosophically from the New Democrats, at least they have been honest and forthright in their approach, unlike the Liberal Party. They have been honest and forthright. I am therefore disappointed to read the news release that I have before me in my hand where it appears that the leader of the ND opposition is resorting to the same tactics of innuendo that have become so predominant, so prevalent from the leader of the Liberal opposition. It says:

New Democrat Leader Raj Pannu questioned the government on the apparent violation . . .

Apparent violation.

. . . of sections of Bill 11. He also released a letter from an Edmonton ophthalmologist who indicates that there is ample unused capacity at the public Royal Alexandra Regional Eye Care Centre.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to point out is that Bill 11 is no longer Bill 11. It is an act of this Legislature. It has been proclaimed. If someone is violating the act, then that person is breaking the law. If the leader of the ND opposition has evidence that that person is

\*See page 1843, right col., para. 5

breaking the law, then he has a duty to bring that evidence to the minister in charge, and the person who is breaking the law will be prosecuted.

2:30

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Premier that I brought this to the attention of this House right here.

My supplemental to him is again: how can he justify breaching that section that I just referred to of his own health care law – I am talking about law here now – by allowing cataract surgeries in the Capital health region to be contracted out at higher costs when those surgeries could be performed at the Royal Alex eye centre at a lower cost, as the letter from the ophthalmologist clearly indicates?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is raising an allegation. He is suggesting that someone has broken the law. If he has evidence that someone is breaking the law, I would ask him now to take that evidence to the Minister of Health and Wellness and perhaps to the Justice minister, and Attorney General, and we'll have an investigation into it. If the hon. member is wrong in raising this innuendo, in raising these allegations, I would expect him to stand up in this Legislature and apologize.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, all of these contracts are approved through a process. We ask the regional health authorities to satisfy themselves that this is the best value that they can get for the performing of a certain type of procedure; in this case, cataracts. There is a lengthy process that the regional health authorities apply to these contracts before they are brought for the approval of the minister of health. I am satisfied that all of the contracts that have been approved have gone through this rigorous process.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that the regional health authorities do have flexibility to contract out certain services so long as they can be done safely within the guidelines set out by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Those services, from the information I have, are being done well, they're being done safely, and they're being done cost effectively.

### **Provincial Debt**

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, at the recent annual general meeting of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Association a resolution was passed which called for the provincial government to work toward the elimination of provincial personal income tax within five years. Given that sound fiscal policy continues to be a high priority of Albertans, can the Provincial Treasurer advise the Assembly if it remains the priority of government as Albertans have clearly identified to pay down and eliminate Alberta's debt?

### **Speaker's Ruling**

#### **Questions about Political Party Activity**

THE SPEAKER: Just a second, hon. Provincial Treasurer, please. One of the areas that is not to be questioned in question period is political party matters, so I presume this question has to do with the government policy and nothing to do with the political party.

MRS. BURGNER: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

### **Provincial Debt**

*(continued)*

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it indeed does have to do with government policy. If I go back to a questionnaire sent out to Albertans, Talk It

Up: Talk It Out, a survey of 1999, they said by 74.8 percent to pay down the debt. That's what Albertans said. That is their priority.

It is a priority of this government inasmuch as we've put it into law. We have an act that says that we must retire the debt in the province of Alberta. We put it into a 25-year mortgage payment cycle so that the average person in the province of Alberta could understand it. They have 25-year mortgages on their businesses, on their homes.

Well, fortunately, we've been blessed in the province with onetime revenue increases due to the cyclical nature of oil and gas, and we've been able to pay that debt down to \$8 billion in about six years. We will eliminate that debt on these types of projections in another two to three years. That given, that will set us in a position where we're not paying interest on that money, interest which in 1994-95 was \$1.7 billion on a 22 and a half billion dollar debt.

So I'm pleased to re-emphasize: our main priority as stated by Albertans is to pay down the debt and get rid of the interest burden.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, how can we be sure that the province will have the economic growth and projected revenues needed to either reduce personal income tax, eliminate health care premiums, eliminate the education portion of the property tax, reduce gasoline tax, or indeed eliminate any taxes which Albertans may identify as we move to a debt-free Alberta?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I appreciate about my job is that I have hundreds and hundreds of people within Alberta and in other jurisdictions commenting on the state of the Alberta economy and our fiscal plan. Today I noticed with interest that the Toronto-Dominion Bank of Canada said, "I think Alberta will remain the low-tax jurisdiction in all of North America." The story confirms that the top financial houses like TD have recognized Alberta and its government's work in setting its fiscal framework.

A little while ago Moody's stood notice that in three months they will take us to a triple A rating, the highest in this country, higher than the sovereign, which is unheard of. A part of a sovereign country, one of the provinces of Canada, will have a higher rating than the government of Canada on a domestic basis. That is unheard of.

On another note we have put in place by law three-year business plans, debt retirement plans, and we have had other people look at this and say: "If you follow that pattern, if you remove your debt and you start lowering taxes, you will drive your gross domestic product under these plans. You will create more jobs, and in so doing, you will return moneys back to the government which can be used to sustain the tax cuts as well as the lowering of fees, property taxes, and business taxes."

Not long ago we had a report from the Business Tax Review Committee in the province of Alberta that indicated that if we took \$955 million out in business taxes, small business and corporate, that it would drive the economy of Alberta in four years out by 1.8 percent gross domestic product and create the equivalent of 30-some thousand jobs. That coupled with the lowering of personal income tax starting on January 1 by \$1.3 billion will drive another percentage point in gross domestic product and create another 10,000 jobs. The combined effect of those tax cuts alone will create 40,000 jobs in four years and a 2 and a half percent increase in gross domestic product. That will sustain the concerns of the hon. member that we can continue to keep low taxes, low fees and ensure that Alberta is a place to invest and do business.

### **Speaker's Ruling**

#### **Brevity in Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'm dutifully trying to make sure



that we have a time allocation here for questions and answers that really balances, so I think I must tell you that because of the rather lengthy explanation provided by your colleague, we're now going to move on to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

### **Electric Utilities Deregulation** (continued)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's electricity deregulation has turned into an Alberta disadvantage for many businesses across this province. Lethbridge Iron Works, an iron foundry established in 1898, is facing a 250 percent increase in its electricity costs in 2001 under the Premier's deregulation system. The company says that it would have to raise its prices by 12 and a half percent in 2001 just to break even and is now faced with three options in the future: close its doors or face massive layoffs or possible bankruptcy. My questions are to the minister of resources. How can the government claim that this electricity deregulation will result in lower prices when companies such as Lethbridge Iron Works are faced with a massive 250 percent increase in their electricity costs in 2001?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I have to be reasonably careful in this particular matter because one of the 10-point action plans that I announced recently covers the issue of the Lethbridge situation in relation to electricity costs. The surveillance administrator will be specifically looking at the Lethbridge situation in relation to the pricing of electricity. That report should be due at the end of November of this year.

2:40

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that there are a number of businesses out there that have different ways of obtaining electricity, that to start with, over a million residential individuals including residential farms won't have to make a choice for five years.

I go on further. In relation to industrial consumers those industrial consumers that use less than 250,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity also have up to three years before they have to choose if they want to get out of the regulated system.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker – and this may address some of the issues in relation to the Lethbridge situation – a number of major industrial customers have already signed long-term contracts with the power purchase holders and other suppliers in that particular area. Some companies may not have chosen to do that and may be interested to participate in the new sale that's coming on.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, how are they supposed to sign long-term contracts when the companies that are selling the electricity do not even know at this point what the cost is going to be for their electricity? How can they get those long-term contracts?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the power purchase arrangement holders, which hold, you know, over 60 percent of the electricity in Alberta, know what the prices are and therefore can sit down with the people that are interested in obtaining electricity. Again, I'd just like to say that after the market surveillance report is completed, which will happen within a month, I'm looking forward to seeing if there are some discrepancies in the pricing structure for that particular area. In the meantime, at the end of this month we will be selling another 2,000 megawatts of electricity in small blocks of two-megawatt packages, which allow companies like the Lethbridge company to be able to purchase their electricity requirements directly from the power pool. Therefore, the option is there.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, could the minister explain how that two-megawatt option is going to help a company that's consuming electricity at the rate that the Lethbridge Iron Works is? Two megawatts is insignificant in terms of their total cost.

MR. CARDINAL: There will be 2,000 megawatts of electricity sold, Mr. Speaker, at the end of November. The smaller packages were requested by working with individual consumers out there to determine how the packages may be sold, and the recommendation was to have minimum two-megawatt packages, but the packages can be a lot larger than that. Therefore, the company can purchase a number of packages like that.

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

### **Anno Domini Exhibit**

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Would the minister explain why he did not remove all references, visual and verbal, to Robert Latimer in the Anno Domini exhibit at the Provincial Museum when it became apparent that the inclusion of this person in the context of the beatitudes presentation was, in fact, communicating the wrong message?

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to put the issue in context. The display, Anno Domini: Jesus through the Centuries, is a very, very significant display. It's been put together by people all around the world. We've had curators from various museums involved, also a 35-member advisory committee. Of this whole display the written and video portion dealing with the beatitudes is very, very small. There was concern, yes, brought to me in a way which I won't go over. I did not agree with the misinterpretation placed on this particular piece of the display.

However, in fairness to the folks who had the concern, I sat down with the directors of the museum and asked them to review it and see if they could in any way take away the possibility of this particular misinterpretation. The result was that the curator – and I think it's important to note: the curator and not the minister – put together a new news clip which only referred to Latimer by name once, removed the picture from it, and the final comments are from the prosecutor that stated very clearly that murder is murder is murder. The intention was not at any time to take sides or to present a particular view.

The new clip – and I would suggest that all members have a look at this again – that is being run there is very good, very neutral. As a matter of fact, it sides more on the side of what the AACL would like. I would have to say that the province and the government in no way, shape, or form condone murder in any way. I would say that the references to him are taken out sufficiently to where there is no possibility of misinterpretation at this point.

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

### **Electric Utilities Deregulation** (continued)

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just like with Bill 11 this government is indulging in a massive propaganda campaign to misinform and to distort and to cover up its responsibility in the

skyrocketing electricity prices in this province. The spin campaign is designed to cover up this government's five years of bungling of this electricity deregulation and is costing Albertans millions and perhaps billions over the next 10 years. My questions today are for the Acting Premier and perhaps his fall guy, the Minister of Resource Development. Why are the Premier, this minister, and the former minister misleading Albertans by claiming that the cost of natural gas is responsible for higher electricity prices when this government's own market surveillance administrator says that "the increase in electricity prices is not adequately explained by [high natural] gas cost"?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we're not, but I'll have the Minister of Resource Development answer that.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd just like to indicate, you know, that in the March 17, 1998, debate on the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, which laid out how the electrical deregulation would take place and even identifies dates and time lines including 2001 for full deregulation, the member asked me the question and at the time said, "I must say on behalf of myself and at least a good deal of my caucus that we intend to look upon this bill favourably." Today he comes out with such remarks. It's funny how things change.

Of course high electricity prices are across North America; it's not only in Alberta. Now, in relation to the issue of generation itself today 50 percent of generation is done by coal, which costs about \$30 a megawatt, and about 34 percent by natural gas. This is where the increased costs come in as a natural gas issue. The old generation plants that were put in place – actually some of them took up to 10 years to approve. Genesee is one plant.

So the old process, the regulated process, had difficulties also. In fact, by the time that plant was completed, the overrun on the cost was \$600 million. That \$600 million, Mr. Speaker, was added to the consumers, so we are paying for it. Therefore, there are a number of issues that caused that.

MR. WHITE: Why do this Premier and his government and this minister continue to mislead Albertans by claiming that this government's mismanagement is not responsible for higher prices when his own market surveillance administrator says that the five years of uncertainty has caused "reluctance on the part of suppliers to invest in new supply"?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, since I was included in that question, I will answer some of it.

The minister is quite correct when he said that there is a changing dynamic to electricity production in North America, not just here in Alberta. By the time the next 2,700 megawatts comes on by the year 2003, the amount of power produced by coal, which was a cheap power source that we had, will be around 50 to 56 percent of the province's grid.

2:50

Over the last three years there have been some great changes made in technology, technology as it relates to gas turbines that are going into many of the plants in the province, in cogeneration plants and new combined-cycle gas turbine plants that are going in freestanding, like the one that's going in next to Calgary. There have also been small microturbines put on flares, which has been part of our environmental progress in this province to get rid of natural gas flares that are out there on the horizon. There's also been wind power come on. You look at Vision Quest and some of the

companies that are going in on Cowley Ridge with major wind turbines. Those power plants that are going to be onstream are going to be high-cost producers.

You know that Enmax and some of the rest have contracted that high-cost production to go into their mix because people have said: we believe in elements of the climate change issue; we want this new technology to come on, and we're willing to pay for it. Is the opposition saying that they're not interested in the new technology which will help CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and that may be a cost of higher power? Are they saying that they're against climate change? Why don't they stand up and say that?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, again, brevity is very important. I'm coming to the conclusion that this Assembly actually wants a debate later on this afternoon on this matter.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is this Premier, the current minister, and the former minister continually misleading Albertans by claiming – they probably mislead their government too – that there's a significant new generation coming onstream when his own market surveillance administrator says, "The numbers quoted in regard to new supply are . . . gross numbers, which overstate the net capacity brought to the system"?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, in relation to supply, the peak demand for this winter is projected to be 7,748 megawatts, but the total supply is over 9,400 megawatts. That leaves 1,650 megawatts. The Provincial Treasurer, of course, mentioned that in the last three years the new generation onstream brought in another 1,400 megawatts, and in addition to that we expect another 1,600 megawatts to come onstream in the next little while. In fact, the Joffre plant, I just found out today, will probably come onstream before the end of November.

When you go back to 1995, Mr. Speaker, there were 15 individual units generating electricity. Today you have over 30. That shows you how the system can work.

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

### **Working Alone Regulation**

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the tragic death of Tara Anne McDonald at a fast-food outlet in my constituency reminded us all of the importance of doing all we can to ensure that our workplaces are safe. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister please tell us what has been done to protect workers who may be required to work alone?

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

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After the tragic death of Tara Anne McDonald I think most if not all Albertans were deeply affected. I talked earlier about the role of Tara Anne's mother in moving this along.

We already had a general safety regulation task force that was out conducting hearings, and we added, then, a working alone safely component to some of the things that they were looking at. We also put together a committee that would look at best practices as they

could be found not only here in the province but throughout the rest of North America.

The working-alone regulation that's now been put into place, Mr. Speaker, obligates employers in this province to do three very practical things. The first is that they must assess the hazards in their particular workplace. Second, they must – and we know they'll work with their employees in doing this – take appropriate safety measures to reduce those hazards if they are unable to actually eliminate them. The third and perhaps important as anything we have done is that there must be a communication system in place so that if the employee who is working alone runs into some particular difficulty, they will have a means to be able to respond so that someone can then react in an emergency situation.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, that the new regulation is practical, we believe it's a responsible reaction to the situation, and most of all we believe that it's enforceable.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new working-alone regulation affects many small employers who may not know how to conduct a hazard assessment and that a written hazard assessment creates more paperwork for them, can the minister please tell us how his department is helping employers meet these new requirements?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, I'd be pleased to, Mr. Speaker. Again, earlier today I tabled a document that was called Working Alone Safely, and this is a best practices document that attempts, then, to cut through perhaps some of the paperwork that might be required. The handbook provides the opportunity for employers to use it as a checklist. We provide in that particular document scenarios that should be developed for five different situations where employees can be found working alone.

So with this checklist we believe that employers, especially small employers, would be able to quite rapidly work through the situation and with very little inconvenience be able to come up with a safety regulation that would apply to their particular workplace.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us why he did not consider making it mandatory for two people to work these night shifts?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to indicate that what we have in front of us now in the new regulation and in the best practices points out the power of one, points out the power that one person can have when they become energized over a situation and become committed to that situation.

Once again, I want to acknowledge the efforts of Deb Dore, the mother of the slain worker. Through her efforts the safety of people working alone has a higher profile now within our department than any other workplace health and safety issue. Companies that had never before considered looking at the particular hazards that might exist in their workplace are now conducting these hazard assessments, and of course with that we know that more employers are looking at their overall health and safety programs.

As it relates to legislation directed to working alone, it was my understanding, based on the information that was provided to us and a review of the particular research that was made available to me through this committee, that it was in the best interest of employees working alone and also of those employers who employ people in these kinds of situations to develop sound safety practices and provide, then, emergency communication and that this was the way in which it could appropriately be dealt with. We looked at other jurisdictions across this country and of course the States, and we

found that there was no jurisdiction that prohibits working alone. It was my decision then – and I accept the responsibility for it – to move forward with the regulation and with the best-practices document that was submitted earlier.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wishes to clarify a response.

MR. MAR: Correct myself, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, correct yourself, please.

### **Cataract Surgery**

*(continued)*

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is to the best of my recollection in responding to a question. I referred to the value of contracted services under the Health Care Protection Act. I believe I cited the figure of \$50 million. I was not correct. It is closer to \$9 million, which, as I correctly said, is .16 of 1 percent of a \$5.6 billion budget.\*

3:00

head: Members' Statements

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

We'll proceed, first of all, with the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

### **Alberta Dress Tartan**

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think it's appropriate this afternoon to report progress on Alberta's newest provincial emblem, the Alberta dress tartan. Bill 205, the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000, became law this past July 1, and then just a few days later the Alberta dress tartan was officially introduced to Albertans at the opening ceremonies of the ScotDance Canada Championship Series. The event was held at the Ice Palace in West Edmonton Mall, where 40 dancers from across the province showcased a special dance on a stage skirted with the Alberta dress tartan to commemorate the unveiling.

During this special performance dancers re-created the weaving of the new tartan culminating in a finale featuring a stage flooded with dancers wearing the Alberta dress tartan. The high-energy performance received a standing ovation and set the tone for the largest highland dancing event ever staged, with 1,185 dancing competitors from Canada, the United States, Australia, England, and Scotland.

Also over the summer two highland dancers from Calgary were accepted to compete in front of the royal family at the Braemar Highland Games in Scotland. One of the dancers was Ashley Stowkowy, who together with her highland dance instructor, Gail Danysk, approached me with the Alberta dress tartan proposal.

This invitation was quite an honour and one not extended to many dancers. To have two dancers from Calgary's Gillie Callum Highland Dance school perform at this prestigious event was special in itself, but even more thrilling was that they were able to wear their formal Alberta dress tartans as representatives of this province.

I am also able to report this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, that the Alberta dress tartan was officially registered just last week in the registry of all publicly known tartans.

Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I say that Albertans are proudly wearing the Alberta dress tartan both at home and abroad as a symbol of their Alberta pride. Thank you.

\*See page 1839, right col., para. 6

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

### **MRI Services**

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans take the level and accessibility of their health care seriously and will never agree to a system of health care delivery that makes a profit from someone's illness. In 1994 this Premier's health care cuts resulted in a very real crisis in Alberta's health care system that is still unresolved. These actions set the stage for the growth of private, two-tier health care in this province and allowed private MRI clinics to profit at the expense of Albertans' health.

The Premier continually uses the word choice, but the reality is that the choice is only for those that can afford it. In the provision of MRI services the Premier has manufactured an environment where Albertans are left with only two choices: they can either pay about \$700 per MRI scan in a private clinic to get faster service, or they can wait months to have the public system provide the service.

The Premier has said that the only people who will pay for an MRI service are those who are healthy and just want to have their head or leg or arm checked out. On May 17 he also, however, said that if an MRI is necessary and prescribed by a doctor, it will be covered by the public system. In a recent letter to the provincial minister of health Allan Rock, the federal Minister of Health, wrote that "medically necessary MRI scans are insured health services" and that "the practice of insured persons purchasing medically necessary MRI services is a [Canada Health Act] concern."

The question remains: why does the Premier and his minister of health insist on contravening the Canada Health Act by refusing to pay for medically necessary MRIs? Are they waiting for the federal government to fine this province yet again to ensure that this government complies with the Canada Health Act principles?

Thank you.

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

### **Camrose Continuing Care Project**

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on the \$25.8 million Camrose continuing care capital project announced November 3 by the ministers of Health and Wellness and Infrastructure. This project means construction of five new facilities on four sites in Camrose and will increase the number of care choices for current and future continuing-care clients. The new facilities will replace spaces at the Rosehaven care centre and the Bethany long-term care centre.

By focusing on new and innovative ways to provide care and housing, this project will be the flagship for the future of continuing-care services across Alberta. It was developed using the Broda report as a planning guide. Emphasis will be placed on smaller facilities, on providing more privacy and personal choice in service delivery, and on maintaining client independence.

This is a giant step forward for continuing care and supportive housing in Camrose. The city faces a relatively unique situation of having 20 percent of its population over the age of 65. I hope this continuing-care project will serve as a model for other communities as they, too, face the challenges of an aging population in the years ahead.

This leading-edge project wouldn't have been possible without the partnership between this government, the East Central regional health authority, and the Bethany Group. I'm proud to take this opportunity to recognize the Bethany Group for their hard work and dedication over the years, culminating in this very important

development. The group has a 78-year history of providing excellent continuing-care services in Camrose.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members on a point of order.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

### **Point of Order**

#### **Oral Question Period Rules**

MR. DICKSON: Yes. With your leave, Mr. Speaker, I was going to address the point of order raised by my colleague the Leader of the Opposition. The authority would be *Beauchesne* 408(2). The question that attracts a point of order or the response would be the third set of questions asked by the Leader of the Official Opposition. The first question in that third set and the response of the Premier was to this effect. Now, I don't have the Blues yet, but what I heard the Premier say was that the first private MRI clinic in this province was approved by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

What is particularly frustrating about this is that this is not the first time this issue has come up. There's ample authority, Mr. Speaker, that when a member in this Assembly stands and asserts a particular fact, it's accepted by members that in fact that was the member's intention and that member's knowledge. I recall over a year ago standing on a similar point of order. If members refer to sessional paper 149/95, that was tabled in this Assembly before, it was a response to Written Question 149. This is the answer from the government of the province of Alberta, and it says, "Private MRI clinics were not in operation prior to May, 1993." I could go on, but that's the relevant portion.

What we've got is a fact that there were no private MRI clinics prior to May of 1993, and I'm advised by the Leader of the Opposition that she did not approve any private MRI clinic during her time as minister of health.

So those are the facts, and it's the government's own document, this response to Written Question 149. This has been raised before. Surely the Premier has been advised in terms of what relevant documents have been tabled in the House. For him to persist in initially the publication but now the republication of what is a defamatory statement is completely unacceptable. It doesn't meet the standard that we expect of any member, never mind the Premier of the province.

3:10

This is not simply a question of an error, and it can't, in my respectful view, simply be dismissed as the Premier not having paid attention to detail. I think this is the second time that this error has been pointed out, and I think it requires a direct intervention from you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that this inaccuracy is not republished again and again. It certainly has the effect, I assure you, of violating 408(2), which talks about answers that "should not provoke debate." What could be more provocative than the persistent repetition of a completely false and inaccurate statement?

Those are the observations I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the opposition uses miscues and misdirection to try and take the public's attention away from the facts. The sessional paper, which the hon. member refers to, speaks specifically about when MRIs are in operation. It doesn't say anything, at least not as was quoted. I haven't had the opportunity to read it today, but I'm sure that if it

said anything about when they were approved, he would have read it. The indication that was made this afternoon in question period, as I heard it, was a question of when they were approved.

Now, I don't think it's provoking debate at all to point out historical information in terms of who were previous ministers' of health in this province and what happened under their watch and whether it was approved or not approved at that particular time, although the hon. member has not really addressed the question of when it was approved. Whether or not it was or it wasn't, the bottom line is that we have had MRIs in this province only for some 10 years, and we are the province that has moved up rather rapidly in terms of the number of MRIs and the number of scans that are being provided to the people of Alberta. As the Minister of Health and Wellness indicated today, it is projected that some 40,000 MRI scans will occur in this province this year, and with the six new MRIs that have been brought on in the private sector, we will have the largest number per capita of MRI scans in this province.

The issue that the Official Opposition House Leader raised has not addressed the question of approval, when they were approved, but obviously if they were in operation in May of '93, it stands to reason that they must have been approved some time previous to that. It takes some period of time to install and get operational MRI machines, as we well know, having approved the money for the purchase of six new MRIs in the public system last May, which will be operational in this province within the early part of the year 2001. It stands to reason that there's a period of time prior to operation for approval.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, one of the pieces of research that the chair does not have in front of him, of course, is the historical knowledge of exactly what day a particular event occurred. One hon. member says: well, certain things were in effect on a certain date. Another hon. member says that another hon. member had approved something before that time. The chair is not in a position to ascertain that at the moment.

This certainly is a dispute about facts, and the hon. Opposition House Leader was certainly in a position to stand and correct what the hon. member believes was a misrepresentation of fact with respect to a colleague of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's with respect to this.

Now, the chair of course can dutifully leave the Assembly and go to his office and find all kinds of documents with respect to this matter, but perhaps there's a better judge at the moment for something like this if it deals with misrepresentation of facts. If there are many of our colleagues up above me in the press gallery, I'll invite them to in fact do a little bit of investigation and ascertain who did in fact put into effect a certain thing at a certain date, and that would probably lead to somebody writing an article or something with respect to that.

In this particular Assembly, in terms of where he says that all hon. members have a chance to clarify it, I'm sure we'll hear more about this in the ensuing days to come. This definitely is a matter of a dispute, and all hon. members might want to read the House of Commons book that we have and particularly refer to the text on page 433 on how it's dealt with in terms of a parliament.

There were a number of other strange things that happened here today as well. I want to repeat to all members again particularly that section in *Beauchesne* dealing with questions and asking for legal interpretations. On one or two occasions the chair did hear one hon. member say to another hon. member, "You are breaking the law," or alluding to something like that. If an hon. member in this Assembly is being accused of breaking the law, as I understand the system of organization that we operate under, we have a free and independent

police that must be advised of any lawbreakers and wrongdoings, and suitable investigations must occur. Of course, then the police would be in a position to lay charges against anybody who is breaking the law. So that certainly is the manner in which we operate.

head: Statement by the Speaker

### Motions under Standing Orders 30 and 40

THE SPEAKER: Now, we have to deal with a Standing Order 30 application and a Standing Order 40 application. The chair would just like to point out to the author of the Standing Order 30 application at this point in time what the chair is going to do today with respect to that Standing Order 30 application. This may come up in the future, and should it ever occur in the future, one has to be very, very cognizant and careful of the procedure in place.

The Speaker received in his office at 3:26 p.m. on November 6 notice from the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that it was her plan to come forward with a Standing Order 30 to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss an urgent matter of business, but the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition did not identify to the Speaker what that Standing Order 30 would be. Under Standing Order 30 the rule is very, very clear in what it says. Should another standing order application have arrived in the Speaker's office with identification of the text of what that Standing Order 30 would have been, the Speaker would have been dealing with the second one first today because it would have completely abided by the rules of this Assembly.

Now, we received a Standing Order 30 application, as I indicated, at 3:26 p.m., November 6, and then today on November 14 at 9:20 a.m. the text of the Standing Order 30 did arrive. So it abides by that. However, one or two hon. members have also raised the situation of: which standing order would you deal with first, the Standing Order 30 application or the Standing Order 40 application that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands submitted? That arrived in the Speaker's office at 11:15 a.m. on November 9, and it certainly did complete the text and abided by all of the conditions laid out in our Standing Orders. However, as Standing Order 30 requires an intervention and decision by the Speaker with respect to the matter whereas a Standing Order 40 requires a decision of the House, it would appear to be more appropriate that we deal first of all with the Standing Order 30 application, which will provide for a decision from the chair and not involve the members of the House.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

THE SPEAKER: So we're now going to proceed with the Standing Order 30 application. One more time and once again to draw it to all members' attention, the Standing Order 30 application has to do with a member requesting leave

to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance of which written notice has been given to the Speaker at least two hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly.

The operative word is "urgent."

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

3:20

### Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to impress upon you the validity of this motion under Standing Order 30. I am asking that you rule that the matter is indeed urgent and that it is consistent with the requirements of Standing Orders rules. For the record I

would like to read into the debate of this Legislature the motion which I propose.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the government's mismanagement of the deregulation of electricity markets in Alberta resulting in inadequate supply to meet rising demand and skyrocketing prices for consumers.

Mr. Speaker, I am guided today in my arguments by two very important authorities that govern the proceedings of this House. I'll be referring in my arguments to *Beauchesne* 387, 389, 390, and our own Standing Order 30.

*Beauchesne* 387, in the section entitled Motions to Adjourn the House under Standing Order 52 to Discuss an Important Matter, says:

The Standing Order is clear that the question [must] be specific and must require urgent consideration. It must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

*Beauchesne* 389 goes on to say:

The "specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration" . . . must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention.

*Beauchesne* 390 says:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means "urgency of debate," when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules . . . do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough.

Of course, Standing Order 30 spends a good deal of time dealing with the issue. Section 30(1) says that

any member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business . . . to discuss a matter of urgent public importance of which written notice has been given to the Speaker at least two hours prior to the sitting.

That, of course, has been done.

Under section 30(6) "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." It goes on to say in 30(7) that

- (a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration . . .
- (c) not more than one matter may be discussed on the same motion;
- (d) the motion must not revive discussion on a matter which has been discussed in the same session . . .
- (e) the motion must not be based on a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the matter before us is in fact a matter of clear urgency and meets all the requirements set out in the sections that I have outlined. In accordance with *Beauchesne* 387 the government's mismanagement of electricity market deregulation in Alberta is "specific," requires "urgent consideration," is "within the administrative competence of the Government," and is needed because there has been no other reasonable opportunity to debate. The question is specific: be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, mismanagement of deregulation, rising costs, and skyrocketing prices for consumers.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are not asking for a decision. We are asking for a debate. We're being very specific. The question requires urgent debate. There are two issues that come out of these authorities on the question of urgency. One is the distinction in *Beauchesne* between the urgency of debate and the urgency of the substance. The two are not unrelated, of course. There is an urgency of debate, as I have outlined, because we have no other opportunities – this is the earliest possible time – and because of the substance of the problem.

The substance of the issue is the second feature of the urgency argument. Mr. Speaker, all Albertans are affected by this problem

of rising electricity prices: all homeowners, all home renters, all businesses, all industries, senior citizens, young families, students, major manufacturing companies, small businesses. The list of affected Albertans is immense, and it affects people at home and at work. People with low incomes are choosing whether to heat or eat. Businesses are being hurt, and the government's mismanagement is destroying the Alberta advantage.

The question deals with a matter clearly within the administrative competence of the government, although the use of the word "competence" is questionable there. The plan to deregulate the electricity market has been pursued by this government for five years now, despite the warnings of the Official Opposition. The problem is the direct product of this government. It is within the administrative competence to pursue deregulation, and it is within the same administrative competence to debate it now.

Mr. Speaker, the question posed does not have any other reasonable opportunity for debate. There have been no other opportunities to debate this issue. The results of deregulation have been seen coming for a long time by this side of the House, but while they finally became apparent over the summer and the fall, there has been no opportunity to debate them until now. We have only one question period to question the government, but if question period was sufficient to deny a Standing Order 30, then there would be no need for Standing Order 30s, period. But question period is not sufficient, and that is why we have Standing Order 30 for issues like this. Therefore, in accordance with *Beauchesne* 387 I submit to this Assembly that this is the most appropriate time and place to deal with the issue.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, and in accordance with *Beauchesne* 389, the urgent matter is "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." Again, this is an issue affecting all Albertans. Skyrocketing prices affect everyone in their pocketbook. Some are being hit to the point that they must choose, as I've said, to heat or eat. An opportunity is needed to address the plight facing Alberta citizens and business.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we have already addressed the issue of urgency further clarified in *Beauchesne* 390. If electricity is not debated here and now, there will not be an opportunity to debate it in this Assembly prior to its full implementation on January 1, 2001, 47 days from now. This province may be facing unscheduled interruptions in power supply and the closure and exodus of business. This is a policy that will affect the lives of Albertans for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, in closing and in accordance with your own Standing Orders, I want to re-emphasize the urgency of this question. I challenge the Premier and his government to agree to an emergency debate on this issue, an issue of importance to every single Albertan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Just one clarification. These are not my Standing Orders. These are the Standing Orders of this Assembly.

The hon. Minister of Resource Development on this point of order. We're dealing with the application under the point of order.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opposition's motion under Standing Orders to put aside the regular business of the Assembly to debate the issue of this government's management of the deregulation of Alberta's electricity industry is not in order and should be denied on several grounds.

Mr. Speaker, no emergency exists today. Therefore, urgent debate is not needed, and there will be other reasonable opportunities to address the matter over the next few weeks during question period. I would be pleased to respond to any of the hon. members'

accusations at that time. The government has been pursuing a steady and deliberate course towards deregulation since 1993. The opposition has had years to discuss the issue of this government's approach to deregulation in the House. In fact, the original introduction of the legislation came in 1995. The opposition then participated in the discussions, and with the amendment in 1998 the opposition members again participated in discussions. From reading the *Hansard*, there was general support for deregulation and competition at the time from a number of the members, so they are aware of the process of deregulation.

3:30

As well, Mr. Speaker, the government intends to introduce personal income tax amendments during this fall session, and that directly relates to energy rebates. Therefore, there will also be an opportunity to debate energy matters at the time.

Mr. Speaker, we have had and continue to see investment in generation in Alberta. In fact, there are double the number of generators out there at this time compared to 1995. Deregulation is not the cause of rising prices. In fact, deregulation will put a downward pressure on the energy prices.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Relevance**

THE SPEAKER: I think, hon. minister, what we're doing now is debating a possible motion. We're going to determine whether or not it's going to be debated. It's now dealing with the urgency of a Standing Order 30 application to waive all the business of the day. You just deal with this one.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned a number of issues in relation to the urgency. Through this deregulation process, when January 1, 2001, takes place, when full deregulation kicks in, to start with, 85 percent of Albertans connected to the electrical system – that's over one million residential units, residential homes, and residential farms – have up to five years, have up to 2005, before they have to make a decision to change. Within that five years they can also change. Over 124,000 customers, who are commercial, industrial, and municipal users that use less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, can also remain with their present regulated supplier up to three years. Therefore, the urgency in those two areas sure isn't there.

In addition to that, I know that a lot of the major industrial users of electricity have already signed long-term contracts with existing suppliers. In fact, a lot of long-term contracts were done and signed before the bidding process took place. The industries and also the bidders knew how much they could bid on the projects, and therefore the urgency definitely is not there.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we also have a sale of additional electricity that is going to come shortly before the end of this month. Another 2,000 megawatts in packages as small as two megawatts will be put up for sale, and it will give the opportunities for larger industries that didn't bid through the initial process or smaller industries or commercial or municipalities even to bid on that, so they would definitely have a supply.

The other one I'd like to mention briefly, Mr. Speaker, is in relation to the actual prices of electricity and natural gas, for an example.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Relevance**

THE SPEAKER: I take it, hon. minister, that what you're basically

doing is saying that you're not concerned about having a debate, that as far as you're concerned, let's have a debate. You're participating in one now. We are on a Standing Order 30 application. I've heard from the Leader of the Official Opposition, and again the same kind of suggestion was made there through body language. So that's it. We've heard your input now.

Anybody else on the opposition side? We're talking about Standing Order 30, and I'm going with the rules of Standing Order 30. Then I'm prepared to hear – does someone else on the government side want to participate in the Standing Order 30 application?

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

THE SPEAKER: Well, there's no question. This is the dilemma with a Standing Order 30 application, hon. member. There is no question.

So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you want to participate on Standing Order 30? Okay. But remember, Standing Order 30.

MR. WHITE: Urgency. Yes. Your admonishments are quite correct, sir. As I understand, Standing Order 30 speaks to the urgency of the matter. Well, sir, the urgency of this is of utmost importance to Albertans. Every single soul in this province relies on this energy.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Relevance**

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me. Thank you very much, but the Standing Order 30 application has to do with the urgency of this Assembly waiving all other of its agenda items to deny all other members an opportunity to deal with the business that's already been advertised for them to deal with, not with the question of the motion. Just tell me where it's impossible for anybody, another member, ever to raise the question of this issue again. That's all I want to know.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. WHITE: Well, sir, there doesn't seem to be any other forum, and the debate that did occur nine months ago was truncated by closure. There were less than 90 minutes of debate on the entire matter. It's so important to the people of Alberta that there must be a forum, and this is the forum.

The member opposite cites question period. Well, question period is not debate. It does not allow the give-and-take. It does not speak of the philosophical elements of whether it's free enterprise or whether it's under a regulated market. Those are some fundamentals that have to be decided. The government opposite says that there have been many, many changes since the time this government started working on this project, and it is true that we have yet to have a debate.

Therefore, sir, I think it's of utmost importance that this House adjourn the business of the day in that we have other days to deal with these elements of business, but this element of business is so important and so important today in that it is less than 47 days until this takes effect. If that occurs, contracts are signed, sealed, and delivered, and then there's no turning back. There are elements in this society, some major elements, that believe there are adequate reasons to say: stop, halt, and take assessment of the situation in that it can be stopped now. All contracts can be made null and void, whereas they cannot be the closer we get.

Sir, 37 percent of the energy is yet to be sold. That could be stopped today. Businesses are leaving Alberta, and there is an expectation . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please work with me on this one; okay? These are the rules of the House: Standing Order 30. I mean, three or four of the things you just finished saying are not in the motion, so I don't follow this.

Okay. I'm going to hear two more, and that's it. We're going to be here all afternoon. We're coming to a head on this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, then followed by the Government House Leader.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the motion of the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be ruled in order, and I have a number of reasons for saying that. The main reason why the Assembly should debate this at this time is that there are certain irrevocable decisions that are going to be made between the time of this sitting of the Legislature and the next election or the next sitting of the Legislature.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Relevance**

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. Now, I appreciate what the hon. member is saying, but when you have a Standing Order 30 application, it has to do with the unavailability of any other opportunity in the Assembly to deal with the matter, not the importance of the question. That's the difficulty with the acuity of the arguments under a Standing Order 30 application.

#### **Debate Continued**

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, you're absolutely correct. In order to set aside the ordinary business of the day, to set aside the opportunity for private members to have their bills, which have been carefully considered, put on the Order Paper, to set aside private members' motions this afternoon on issues that have been researched and where members have brought forward their time, to set aside at 4:30 the bringing in of letters from the Lieutenant Governor so that the supplementary estimates can be considered, to set aside the ordinary business of the day, which is the business of this House, for an emergency debate, Standing Order 30 does require something that is urgent and pressing and has no other opportunity for debate.

3:40

Now, if you look at the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, no member of the opposition or any other member that I can see has put on a written question or a motion for a return requiring information. There's nothing under Motions Other than Government Motions, although, as the Opposition House Leader has mentioned, this issue of deregulation has been extant for some five years. There's been no motion other than government motion put on the Order Paper. No member of the opposition has taken the opportunity of any of the ordinary methods of bringing things to the attention of the House, and now they're bringing a Standing Order 30 asking that the very important business of the private members of this House be set aside and the very important business of bringing forward supplementary supply be set aside.

With respect to supplementary supply, of course, that goes to Committee of Supply, and there are opportunities in Committee of Supply to discuss a wide range of issues and concerns about how government should spend the people of Alberta's resources. There may well be an opportunity in Committee of Supply or under the Appropriation Act debate to raise issues regarding how government revenues are raised and spent. So there may well be opportunities

for members during this session. In fact, if we can get on with the business of the session, get supplementary supply on the table, they'll have an opportunity to debate a wide range of issues relative to how government spends and raises resources that belong to the Alberta government.

So the question of urgency has been eloquently addressed by my colleague the minister of natural resources insofar as he has pointed out that this process is not something that's happened overnight. It's a process that's happened over a period of time. The opposition has acknowledged that that process has happened over a period of time. The question of whether we should adjourn debate in the House really boils down to: is it sufficiently important that there be a debate in this House on this issue today, to set aside all of the work that private members have done to bring their issues to the table and the supplementary supply that the government is bringing to the table this afternoon? I respectfully suggest, Mr. Speaker, that no case for urgency of that nature has been made.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have to address this today. We've heard the Government House Leader speak about the fact that this can be brought up in the budget. That is not true. The budget deals with the financial allocations and the expenditures of this government. This motion is asking for a debate about the management processes. There is no provision in the rest of this session to deal with any kind of policy or management process that deals with how this government is conducting and putting in place the deregulation system. This is our only opportunity to be able to deal with that kind of question in this House.

If we want to start talking about how they're going to deal with the allocation of the rebates, how they're going to deal with the return to Albertans of their money from the auction sales, that kind of thing can be dealt with in the budget. The policy issues cannot. This is the legislative session, this is the House that deals with the policy issues, and we must debate them now in this House before they make any more decisions that will further complicate and confuse Albertans as to what the end result of this process is going to be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you have one kick at the cat. You had it.

Hon. members, there is no doubt whatsoever in the mind of the chair that this is an important matter and that this may very well be a very controversial matter. The difficulty the chair has is that the chair must abide by the rules of this Assembly and enforce the rules of this Assembly in terms of the basis of the documents that we have followed in the past. So, first of all, I'll just comment on the requirement in terms of the notice under the Standing Order 30 application, although I've already talked about this. I certainly viewed it to be adequate in terms of the prescribed times and in order.

For the Speaker to grant a request for leave, the matter certainly must relate to a genuine emergency requiring an urgent debate. If one takes a look at the wording of the motion, the motion itself suggests that the matter of urgent public importance is – and I'm going to quote directly from this – “the government's mismanagement of the deregulation of electricity markets in Alberta.” That in itself does not meet the criteria for an application under the standing order. I would like to draw members' attention to *Beauchesne* 394: “a general question of the maladministration of a department cannot be considered for debate under this Standing Order.” One could



look at this motion and basically view it as a motion of nonconfidence or censure.

As well, the chair would like to draw members' attention to the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the one that we have here in this Assembly. I would ask you to review and refer to the sections on pages 587 and 588 of that book, the criteria used in the Canadian House of Commons for similar applications.

Then I would go one step further. If somehow the chair were to take the subject of urgent public matter to be increased electricity costs, the ongoing nature of that does not necessarily make it a genuine emergency, although it is very important and most controversial. Today 25 minutes of the 50 minutes in question period surrounded this particular matter, and the chair would suspect that in the days to come a fair chunk of question period will be associated with this.

Accordingly, the chair finds that the request for leave is not in order, and the question shall not be put.

#### Point of Order

#### Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Can I stand under 13(2), please, in request of clarification with respect to something you just said?

THE SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, we've heard argument just moments ago that question period amounts to debate, and I thought I heard you in fact confirm that moments ago. I'd ask if you could help me with this. On March 8, 2000, in *Hansard*, page 309, and on April 17, 2000, page 1010, I took your comments then to be that question period is something very different than debate. Since from time to time I expect we will see other Standing Order 30s, I wonder, sir, if you would just help me understand whether you in fact are saying that what happens in that 50 minutes of question period amounts to debate, which is in fact one of the elements of a Standing Order 30. If I could have that clarified, I'd be grateful.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, in clarifying the whole thing, the Speaker would also like to point the attention of the hon. Opposition House Leader to *Beauchesne* 398 and to read it in context in terms of the discussion we're having right now.

Question period is not a debating time. The only thing that the chair did was just point out that in today's question period 25 minutes out of the 50 minutes were devoted to the whole question of electricity. The way questions are framed by certain people and the way questions are answered by other people may lead to some people suggesting that it is debate, but that's not the intent of question period and never has been the intent of question period. The intent of question period is to seek out answers to very specific questions, and if we actually went back to that kind of procedure and had a very specific question seeking out a very specific answer and had a very specific answer to a very specific question, whoa, we would have the true, ultimate question period, but as we're dealing with human beings, all of whom have very determined approaches of their own, sometimes we seem to waive and violate that and move away from that.

So let me just make it very, very clear again, hon. Opposition House Leader. Nothing that was said here this afternoon in terms of coming to this conclusion on this particular Standing Order 30 application would lead anyone to suggest that question period will be turned into a debating Assembly. The reasons were given by the chair, and the chair would repeat again: *Beauchesne* 398.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on a Standing Order 40 application.

#### Electric Utilities Deregulation

Mr. Mason:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly, in light of skyrocketing electricity costs which are punishing consumers and disrupting the Alberta economy, urges the government to call an independent public inquiry into why the deregulation process has failed so badly and put all electricity deregulation on hold until the inquiry reports.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the Legislative Assembly allow me to introduce the motion which I gave notice of earlier. Standing Order 40 requires two things: that it be urgent and pressing. I would argue, first of all, that it is urgent because we are faced with a very serious situation in this province with respect to electricity costs. We have businesses who are writing to the government and writing to the opposition saying that they will no longer be able to carry on their business in this province and are looking at relocating to other provinces. So that indeed is a very pressing and urgent situation.

In terms of dealing with it now and the arguments for dealing with it now rather than later – I tried to allude to that in my previous comments – there are some things that are going to happen between now and the beginning of the new year that will create a very dangerous situation, and this is our only chance to deal with them. The first thing is that there is a second auction, following the failed first auction, that is scheduled for just shortly after this Legislature is supposed to rise. Secondly, the implementation of the deregulation regime takes place on January 1, 2001. After that, by all accounts it will be very, very expensive and very difficult if not impossible to go back if we find we've made a mistake. So that, I think, speaks to the urgency of this question.

3:50

I want to also raise the question that there have been some statements made, some of the answers that were given in the question period, that's been referred to, that are clearly requiring some debate. The opposition has not had an opportunity to respond and cannot respond except in a debate. That is the statement that deregulation is not the cause of the present spike in electricity prices, which both the Premier and the minister have stated. That needs debate, and I think that's putting it mildly, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I would just appeal to members of the House, as well, that in terms of preserving the Alberta advantage, which this government is so fond of talking about, it is essential that low input costs for manufacturing be a part of that. Everything you've worked for, as much as we on this side have disagreed with the method, can go up in smoke if you don't deal with this and deal with it now. This is your last chance, Mr. Speaker, the last chance of the members of this Assembly to deal with this situation.

So I would ask those opposite to give unanimous consent so that we can debate this and have this debate which is very much on Albertans' minds.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the process for a Standing Order 40 application is much simpler than the process for a Standing Order 30 application. This simply requires unanimous consent of the House.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding to Orders of the Day, hon. members, I must point out to you something with respect to the Order Paper. Hon. members may have noted some slight modifications to the early Order Paper circulated November 9. One such modification is the withdrawal of Motion Other than Government Motion 548 to reflect the resignation of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

As well, Bill 14, the Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000, and Bill 22, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000, both now at second reading stage on the Order Paper and introduced under the sponsorship of the Provincial Treasurer, thus not designating a particular individual, now show the name of the current Provincial Treasurer, the hon. Dr. West.

Government Motion 15, proposing the approval in general of the business plans and fiscal policies of the government, will remain as shown in view of the fact that the Order Paper reflects the actual mover of the motion on February 24, 2000.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

### Labour Legislation Review

513. Mr. Fischer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to re-examine Alberta's existing Labour Relations Code and Public Service Employee Relations Act and propose recommendations for their improvement, particularly with respect to collective bargaining agreements.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and begin debate on Motion 513. The intent of Motion 513 is to get debate started on collective bargaining practices in our province and to show that the current process is outdated and seriously flawed.

Confrontational bargaining began half a century ago, when workers had virtually no basic fundamental rights and were forced to become hostile, even militant, to obtain those rights. Over the years, many of these fundamental rights have been enshrined in our Canadian Constitution or have been addressed in our provincial labour statutes. So we have come a long way, and I believe that in today's society there is absolutely no need to use this outdated, hostile bargaining process to arrive at a collective bargaining agreement.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

It is time for a change. You may ask why the need to change when the majority of collective bargaining agreements get ratified without work stoppage and in due time. Here is a letter that I had written to me that describes what a very respected schoolteacher and principal of an elementary school in the Buffalo Trail school division thinks of the process. This letter was written during a long-drawn-out and bitter negotiation of their collective agreement that degraded to a strike vote and lockout situation. He said:

As a teacher in [the Buffalo Trail regional division], I just wanted to let you know that I am truly disheartened by the situation occurring in [the school division] between the trustees and the professional staff of the schools. This seems to be a particular trouble spot for labour relations in our province. Since the beginning of the amalgamation of school boards, we have had difficulty coming up with any reasonable process for establishing a comparatively reasonable contract. The initial years, we spent a great deal

of time and energy trying to put the four former boards on an even playing field in terms of wages and working conditions. The last two settlements have been reached with a great deal of difficulty. We were in an eleventh hour settlement situation in January of this year to reach agreement for a two year contract that was in fact in place for only 8 months! This year we have yet another unique situation with a "lock out" of teachers before giving any real time to allow the negotiations to progress once lock out and strike votes were taken.

As a teacher, I think that we do have a problem [in this division]. I do not think that it is a "money issue," I think that it is a "trust issue." I submit that before any two parties can come to an agreement, they need to be able to "trust" each other. I personally do not feel that that trust exists between the two sides in [this division]. No one is willing to give an inch for fear that the other side might take advantage of their genuine desire to negotiate. Hence, we are miles apart in terms of our relative positions. I also feel that this labour situation will pass, however the bigger problem of "trust" will force us yet [again] into conflict after conflict. As adults fight and continue to fight, the children are the ones who will pay the price and will continue to pay the price, not only through pointless job action, but through a disintegrating employer-employee relationship.

I personally feel that we need help to resolve this problem. The deep seated lack of trust is too ingrained to heal on its own. Someone needs to help us look at this and ask "is this what education in the province of Alberta is all about?" I feel that this needs to be someone outside of our organization who can help all of the partners . . . to focus on the "education of its children as a unified team."

I also have another letter from a teacher parent who expressed her frustration over the long-drawn-out process and her fear that her daughter's education would be hurt.

The dispute ended November 9 with the minister of labour appointing a disputes inquiry board, who very skillfully brought the parties together and an agreement to their contracts. Yes, the dispute was settled, but the damage will not go away for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, during this past year, as bargaining took place, reports from both sides would come from people close to the negotiations about all the things that the other side would not agree to. Sometimes the truth is stretched a little; sometimes it's misinterpreted or distorted and then passed on from one neighbourhood to the other. Statements, sometimes accusations become very personal, even mean-spirited, causing huge hurt within the whole community. Since I've been an MLA, I have personally gone through strikes, lockouts, mediation, arbitration with teachers, nurses, and CUPE employees. They all have one thing in common, that everyone loses, in this case the school boards, the teachers, and the students. This has provided for an unhappy workplace.

4:00

Our government prides itself on listening to Albertans, and my motion is the result of this. My constituents raised their concerns about the collective bargaining process, and I'm acting on those concerns as well as some of my own. Mr. Speaker, I propose to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment that an extensive consultation with stakeholders such as employers, unions, and industry associations take place before any significant changes to the legislation. This consultation, hopefully, will be the basis of a lasting and effective labour climate in our province for years to come. So I also see Motion 513 as the starter for the consultation process that will take place down the road, and I'm sure that some of the ideas and comments from others will be brought forward and could be used.

Mr. Speaker, the primary piece of legislation which governs collective bargaining is the Labour Relations Code. The code

applies to all employers but does not apply to all employees. For example, practising members of the legal, dental, medical, engineering, and architectural professions or persons in managerial positions are not governed by the code. The Labour Relations Code covers processes governing collective bargaining, collective agreements, dispute resolution, strikes, and lockouts. It also governs the rights of parties, unfair labour practices, and establishes the Labour Relations Board. In Alberta 90 percent of the collective bargaining agreements and 79 percent of the unionized workforce are covered by the Labour Relations Code. The remainder are covered under the Public Service Employee Relations Act, Universities Act, Technical Institutes Act, Banff Centre Act, Police Act, and the Canadian Labour Code for Alberta employees.

Mr. Speaker, one alternative may be to revisit the existing legislation and put in some rules that disallow any contact with members from either side. Negotiating in the public and through the media is causing many serious problems. Disallowing contact certainly would alleviate many of these negative communication problems and prevent further conflict. As well, there are other methods of collective bargaining that may be more beneficial to both labour and management, but too often the participants in contract negotiations come away from the process describing the stressful conditions and results as leaving both sides feeling the other side is the enemy. Moreover, the damaged and fragmented relationships that were the byproduct of these sessions do not leave a viable framework to work from in the future.

We must ask ourselves how this is affecting our workers, our businesses, and the economy as a whole. It has been proven time and time again that a peaceful and happy workplace will provide the maximum productivity. People will go beyond the call of duty to help others and to improve efficiency. Therefore, a peaceful labour climate is essential to the betterment of this province.

One alternative that I'd like to propose to you is called interest-based bargaining. Interest-based bargaining has worked well on several occasions in the U.S. in diverse industrial sectors. Interest-based bargaining focuses on negotiators addressing issues on their merits rather than haggling and taking hard stands. This method suggests mutual gains wherever possible and, where interests conflict, insistence that the result be based on fair standards, independent of the forced will of either side. The wanted result of this approach is to create a spirit of co-operation that works beyond the bargaining process.

In Arizona the Salt River Project, a public electricity and water company, used interest-based bargaining after facing a growing stalemate with the union representing its 4,300 employees. The new approach led to a productive contract negotiation and a dramatic decrease in the number of grievances. All grievances had been settled without going to arbitration through prompt meetings between labour and management to solve the problem on a nonprecedent-setting basis.

As well, the Missouri state legislature passed legislation in 1999 that put interest-based bargaining into law, covering all collective bargaining done by school districts in the state. The law has been well received and garnered a great deal of support from the teachers and the administrators alike in the state. Here are some comments from a local superintendent.

Teachers teach and kids learn from the first day of bargaining until the last with interest-based bargaining. The result is remarkably better, leading to solutions that are quite out of the ordinary. In districts that already enjoy good relationships between the school boards and the teachers, interest-based bargaining strengthens the relationships and gives you a new set of skills to work with. You can continue to use the skills throughout the year, long after the bargaining process itself is over.

A comment from a parent: interest-based bargaining is a problem-solving process that tries to meet the needs of all parties; it gives school boards a reason to listen to teachers more.

As well, the Wisconsin State Employees Union recently concluded negotiations using this method.

These are fine examples of interest-based bargaining working. When both labour and management went to the table aware that decisions would not be reached easily but were willing to negotiate in a spirit of goodwill rather than hostility, things got done, and the labour climate benefited. I'm not trying to say that interest-based bargaining is the answer to all our labour issues, but if we can start a process where some agreements are made using interest-based bargaining methods, then we have made some progress. To me this would be a step in the right direction.

So let's consider, folks, what I've said today. I'm asking you to look at our labour relations process and recognize that there is a great need to make changes. It is not in any way intended to take away any bargaining power from either side; it is about finding a better way. Yes, we as legislators have a duty to respect and listen to what Albertans are saying, and they are asking us to please find a better way.

So I ask all members to support Motion 513. It's a step into the 21st century, a step towards a more peaceful labour climate.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Wainwright, just for the record, a clarification: Mr. Speaker is not in the chair.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:10

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with interest that I rise to address the Assembly this afternoon regarding the motion that the hon. Member for Wainwright has presented to the Assembly. Listening to his remarks, I need further clarification, but I believe what he is proposing here is, once again, right-to-work legislation for this province.

I understand he's using the example, Madam Speaker, of the labour negotiations that were going on between the teachers and the officials in the Buffalo Trail school division. I would like to remind the hon. member that last week I attended an induction ceremony for teachers who were becoming members of local 37 in the public school system. Local 37, of course, is one of the larger locals of the Alberta Teachers' Association. I may not have the year correct, but the moderator of that event said that the teachers of this province have had one strike in recent history, and I believe it was in 1972. So to bring forward this argument that there's no stability in labour relations between Alberta teachers and the various school boards across this fine province I don't think is quite sound.

Now, we're blessed this afternoon to have the presence in the Assembly of the hon. minister in charge of our Labour Relations Code, and I'm sure that he is very interested in participating in this discussion or debate this afternoon. Certainly we need balanced labour relations. The hon. minister has used the disputes inquiry board. It is one of the mechanisms that's available to him. Not only this hon. minister but an hon. minister before him in that portfolio used it. It was a mechanism that already existed, and it settled an issue in Calgary. It settled the issue.

The best collective agreement that can be reached is an agreement that's reached without any sort of arbitration. The best agreement is the one that's freely reached by both parties and that both parties are going to benefit from. If we're going to discuss balanced labour relations in this province, we have to look at the whole issue of fairness and the whole issue of equitable treatment in the workplace of all Alberta workers, not just teachers. We have to understand that

workers in this province must be valued and treated with respect. Alberta workers are not a commodity. They are a resource to be valued and cherished.

I believe, Madam Speaker – and the hon. member can correct me if I'm wrong – that he described it as interest-based bargaining. I would have to question whose interest is going to be served here. Because we look at the whole arbitration process in this province, whether it's the public-sector unions or the private-sector unions, and they do not have confidence in the current system.

How do we improve it? That is a very, very good question. The first way to improve it is to restore confidence in the entire process. We have to restore confidence by looking at the Labour Relations Board. We have to look at the turnaround times in hearings. They're different for employers than they are for employees. Is that balanced, Madam Speaker? I don't think so. That would be the first thing that I would do to ensure that we have a balanced labour relations climate in this province.

We need to ensure that high standards are maintained in the entire workforce. We know that in the past there has been confrontation in the workforce, and when we look at the percentage of Albertans who are unionized and we look at the percentage of the workforce that is unionized yet does not have the right to strike and we look at the number of workers who have the right to strike, then the hon. Member for Wainwright would be correct in his assessment that we have an unstable framework, because we have a very low rate of the workforce which can actually withdraw their labour from the work site.

We look at situations that have developed in the recent past. We look at Dynamic Furniture. We look at what happened there. The situation at Dynamic Furniture went on and on and on. It divided entire communities. The reason why this occurred, Madam Speaker, was because of the imbalance in our labour climate in this province. There was the use of replacement workers. There were security guards hired. There were dogs hired. There were light plants employed. It was like a war zone in Calgary. I feel that the easiest way to fix the entire problem would be that after a first contract is signed or a site is certified by a respected union, if there is no contract agreed to by both parties after a six-month period, then binding arbitration be applied and help them both settle their differences. This is not done in this province, and we see the result in Dynamic Furniture.

We look at the unfortunate situation at the *Calgary Herald*, where individuals expressed their democratic right to not only join a union but to have a union represent them with their employer. This, unfortunately, didn't work out for the employees. The situation went on and on and on. I can't understand in this province where at one time the hon. minister could take such an active role – and in this case I'm referring to the fines that were imposed when the Alberta union of public employees had job action earlier this year – why there was not the same regard for the Labour Relations Code when there were long-drawn-out strikes at the *Calgary Herald* and long-drawn-out strikes at Dynamic Furniture and, if we want to go back to a previous time, at Canada Safeway when over 10,000 Albertans were on a legal strike.

Now, we have to be committed, certainly, to improving labour relations in Alberta, particularly in the health care sector. We can do this, Madam Speaker, by simply asking the health care professionals, whether they're in an association or whether they're in a union, to come to the table. By the table I mean between negotiation periods. I believe these organizations should have representatives on the respective health authorities. If we want to talk and we're sincere about improving labour relations in this province, that is one

direction we should go until we agree to elect the regional health authorities.

I am becoming suspicious, like a lot of Albertans, because I don't think the government is too anxious to allow the directors of our regional health authorities to be elected. I read earlier that some hon. members were concerned about political instability not only if members of the general public were elected to the regional health authorities but if, say, Heather Smith, who is an excellent union leader, were to be, for instance, on the board of directors of the Capital health authority. This would be a step in the right direction, as I said, if we're sincere about balanced labour relations, because that way there could be a continuous dialogue between the employer and the employee.

Now, in the past we have discussed this in this very Assembly, and a former minister of labour, when the labour department was a stand-alone department, agreed with me and thought that, yes, there should be a continuous dialogue between the health care professionals, their unions, and the regional health authorities.

4:20

If we're to have a balance between labour's interest in gaining respect from this government, one of the first things that I would suggest be done is a complete inquiry into the whole process of appointments to the labour board. The hon. member did not speak of that when he proposed his motion in respect to collective bargaining agreements, but they're the ones that essentially administer the act, and there are individuals from other jurisdictions who question, unfortunately, the integrity of our system.

Now, I believe we should implement legislation to restore to health care workers the right to strike. Yes, we should have an essential services act in this province. The current system is not working. Every time there is a series of negotiations, the system is held hostage. We hear each side explain their case to the public, and essentially it becomes a public relations exercise. If we were to allow, before the negotiations start, both sides to sit down and determine any number of health care professionals that are going to remain behind or alternate if there is, unfortunately, a picket line, they can alternate so that there are always personnel on hand. This occurs now. Contrary to what a lot of people say, this goes on now, but it would be set up so that the system is never held hostage. Hon. members are astonished at this, but you have to look at the record. You have to look at this record of removing the rights of workers. It is simply not working.

We need also to have a look at the use of replacement workers in job actions and this practice.

MR. SMITH: You support that, eh, Hugh?

MR. MacDONALD: I hear the former minister of labour, the current Minister of Gaming, talking about his support for this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I would like all hon. members across the way to examine the record. I know it's a sensitive record. I know that whenever we look at the three-year plan or we look at the five-year plan or we look at the business plan or we look at a key performance measure, we always take out, Mr. Speaker, the parts that we don't like. In this case I am looking at the Canada Safeway strike. It simply drove the time lost to job action or to strikes way up in this province, so it was removed. We put a star beside that strike and had it removed. That does not tell the true picture, because that was a divisive strike. It still is divisive. It's almost three years. In fact, it is three years, and

people still talk about it. It left an impression on all Albertans. We think we have stable labour relations, but in reality we do not.

I have to caution all members because the hon. member initially, whenever he spoke, said that it's a time for change, but I don't believe it's a step in the right direction. A Time for Change may be a slogan that's used by certain political parties at certain times, but we must have a long look at the Labour Relations Code in this province. If we are to look at solutions that are coming from Arizona in this interest-based bargaining, negotiating on merit, spirit of compromise, this sounds very much like what the unions of convenience, which are growing at a rapid rate in this province, are espousing. I can only ask: who's the dialogue going to be between? Is it going to be between selected, as the government likes to call them, stakeholders, or is it going to include all members of the labour relations community? I would welcome more information on this interest-based bargaining. If I'm wrong, fine, but my first view of this is that it is simply another word for right to work in disguise. We hear the slogan from the Reform Party, A Time for Change – the hon. Member for Wainwright uses this – and that party advocates right-to-work legislation. So I want to caution all hon. members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, to be very, very careful.

We're talking about teachers. We're talking about health care professionals. We're talking about Albertans who are working in this province, and they're proud to work under a collective agreement. You ask each and every one of them; they will tell you that it improves not only their standard of living but also their family's. There has to be an equal share for all Albertans, and I'm not convinced that any sort of debate on right-to-work legislation or interest-based bargaining, or whatever you want to call it, is in the interests of Alberta employees or their employers.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that in 10 years the disposable income of Albertans has risen very little. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre is listening, and she may be interested to know that in the last 10 years the gap in wages between men and women has opened up so there's a 26 percent wage gap between female Albertans employed in the workforce and male Albertans employed in the workforce.

If the hon. member would – oh, my time is up. I'm very disappointed, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak on Motion 513, sponsored by my hon. colleague from Wainwright. I want to thank him for bringing forth a motion on collective bargaining in Alberta.

It's a type of a motion, Mr. Speaker, that I . . .

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business for today has concluded.

4:30

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary

estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

### **Referral of Supplementary Supply Estimates**

23. Dr. West moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-01 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith, be referred to the Committee of Supply.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to my understanding of Standing Order 18(1), this would be a debatable motion, and there are a couple of observations I wanted to make straight off. You know, we used to talk about the current leader of the Alliance as the king of supplementary supply. He's not here now, but we find that he has a successor. It strikes me as of more than passing interest that in a province where the provincial government loves to tout itself as a champion of business, in a province where the government likes to portray itself as having some expertise in terms of the market economy and having some particular kind of insight and sensitivity to how we're going to create those high-skill, high-paid jobs for the young people in this province, we see that every supplementary supply time we have a process that I would think would be fairly embarrassing.

What this really tells us is that we have some serious structural flaws in the process, Mr. Speaker, by which we deal with budgets in this province. We look at provinces like Ontario that have identified this being of particular issue. What the province of Ontario has been able to do – I think they stole a page from the late Laurence Decore, who back in 1993 had proposed a new process for dealing with provincial budgets. It was in a document called Mandate for Change, and but for four percentage points in the popular vote the current Provincial Treasurer might be sitting over here having a critic position and asking the kinds of questions that I am.

One of the things that Mr. Decore had proposed was to develop a much stronger kind of budget scrutiny, a much stronger budget review process. Instead of having the government gnomes in the Treasury Department and I guess however many Conservative MLAs who are involved in that internal secret, invisible process sit around and decide what numbers go in what column, the proposal of Mr. Decore would be to open that up and not start in March, when the estimates are brought in, but in fact start far, far earlier. The Ontario budget model in fact picks up many of the elements of what I call the Decore proposal. You have a powerful all-party committee that picks a number of departments every year. They meet with the ministers of those specified departments long, long in advance.

In Alberta terms, if we were to translate it into the Alberta budget process, this all-party budget committee might start meeting in June, July, or August because that, we know, is when the provincial government starts assembling the disparate pieces that are then welded into some form of a budget process.

It's interesting to me that Mike Harris, who seems to parrot a lot of the things that are said in Alberta and imitate a lot of the things that are done here, has shown a degree of leadership which frankly has gone far beyond what his soul brother and counterpart government in Alberta has chosen to do. Why is it that Ontario has said that there's a better way of dealing with the budget, a way that gets . . . [interjection] I'm talking, Mr. Speaker, about a process. Now, I've got lots to say about the numbers, but, you know, the

Provincial Treasurer ought to turn off his pocket calculator because I'm not going to start getting to the numbers yet. I'm still trying to talk about a philosophical approach to the way we deal with budgets in this province so that we don't get in what I regard as the embarrassing situation of having supplementary estimates come forward with the kinds of numbers that we see being put in front of us here in this particular question then.

I know all members are going to want to take their chairs to hear the further comments that I'm going to make in the next few minutes. Usually, Mr. Speaker, people have been around a little longer before they're walking out on my speeches.

The comment I think I was trying to make is this: we do need a process, a process whereby we have all-party scrutiny, aggressive all-party scrutiny, and a chance to be able to reflect the priorities, the needs, and the issues for all Albertans, not just those Albertans who happen to be represented by the much smaller number of Conservative MLAs that happen to be on whatever standing policy committee or budget review process the government has internally. The fact that year after year after year you see a billion dollar plus supplementary supply tells me that something is not working right. Is it because I don't want money for new schools? Of course not. Is it because I don't want to see additional money going to health care? Of course not. But I do want to see this as some kind of a program.

You know, we've put substantial amounts of additional money into health care in the last couple of years, substantial amounts. If the Minister of Health and Wellness had the floor right now, he'd be telling us and talking about that huge amount, those big infusions of cash. But you know something? [interjection] Well, that minister will have his time, as will the Government House Leader.

The point is that the wait lists don't seem to be getting any shorter in the city of Calgary. The classroom sizes in Calgary-Buffalo aren't shrinking. The number of university professors who choose not to stay at the University of Calgary because the pay rate there puts that university at about number 22 out of the largest 25 universities in Canada – it's not making a difference there.

So we see government talking about additional money going in, but where the rubber hits the road in terms of impact on my constituents and your constituents – we don't see big changes. I believe that's because what we have is money being thrown into areas where there are identified problems but not in thoughtful, strategic ways, not in a form that leads to identifiable, positive outcomes.

We'll be able to come back and talk about some of the specifics, but I'd just say: is government to have us believe that everything in supplementary estimates could not have generally been foreseen? Is the Provincial Treasurer about to tell us that there were just all kinds of emerging things that happened in the five or six months since last spring that there was no way of identifying in advance?

Well, I think that's nonsense. It may be that from time to time we have forest fires, so that requires some additional money, or we may have flooding in Medicine Hat, and that requires some additional assistance. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not what this is about. I mean, if you look through this fat package of supplementary estimates – and we'll be able to do that when that gets referred to Committee of Supply – what you see for the most part are things that we knew last spring required attention and required additional funding.

So the question then becomes: why is it that it takes the government six months longer than the rest of us in this Assembly to find out the shortfalls that require urgent attention? The Provincial Treasurer presumably has a heck of a lot more people giving him advice than this MLA does, and I know there are some real smart people in that department. I know that they talk to people in the cities of this province, they talk to people in the regional health authorities, they talk to people on the school boards, and they talk to

people in the postsecondary institutions. So the needs and the demand for additional resources have been known for a long time, and they were certainly known when we wrestled with the budget estimates in February and March and into April of 2000.

4:40

I want to welcome the two new members of the Assembly. Some of us are on our way out, and I hope that the new members in the Assembly recognize that this is an area that requires enormous attention, and I hope they're more persuasive than I've been able to be in terms of opening up the budget process. You know, people come here from municipal councils, and they can't understand this arcane process that we use to develop a budget, because in those cases many of the municipalities do actually a far more open and transparent kind of budget scrutiny than we see in this Assembly. I mean, we could do so much better. We could just have a vastly better process.

Why wouldn't we do what Ontario has done and have that sort of powerful all-party committee which identifies five or six departments every year, that spends months doing an in-depth kind of analysis to see if we could get it right? Well, let me suggest some of the reasons why maybe government doesn't wish to do it. The first one is that once you pull away the cloak of secrecy, it means that people start looking over your shoulder and they start telling you at an early stage which budget allocation choices are good and which ones they don't agree with. That may mean that you have to more often, more frequently, defend the choices you make, and you have to defend why we can't find money to reduce classroom size but we can find money for a lot of other things.

You know, we have a province where our royalty structure and the kinds of moneys that the province receives, that the people of Alberta receive from the sale of our natural resources is significantly lower than rates charged in each of the other big natural resource provinces in Canada. If you look at Quebec and Ontario and British Columbia and you look at the kinds of rates that exist in terms of royalties, whether we're talking about lumber, whether we're talking about oil and gas, or whether we're talking about mining activity, what you find is a significant difference. And what you'd like to think . . . [interjection] Well, this was my authority, my former colleague Mike Percy, now dean of the business school at the University of Alberta and a fellow with very strong academic credentials. He had coauthored an article with another fellow at the university that identified the gap that exists between what other provinces charge and recover for their citizens compared to what happens in Alberta.

Well, that would be one of the issues that might be dealt with if we had a more open kind of budget process. There are lots of benefits that accrue, and I'm not going to have time to go through and identify all of them.

I just look forward to an explanation from each one of the ministers and from the Provincial Treasurer in terms of why the items in this supplementary supply request could not have been identified and could not have been foreseen. So when I ask questions and when some of my colleagues ask questions, I hope we're not going to be met with nonsensical calls that we don't support money for this, we don't support money for that, or we're opposed to additional funding. Well, that misses the point completely, Provincial Treasurer, through the Speaker. That misses the point completely. What we're trying to do is develop a more responsive process, a more transparent process, a more thorough process than anything we have now, and in an ideal Legislature we would not see these gargantuan supplementary estimate requests. It's as simple as that.

I know that some of my colleagues have observations they want to make as well to the process before we get into dealing with some of the detail, but I just think we have to get off this bandwagon. It's one of the problems with huge, powerful, majority governments. You know, they can always sort of clean up their mistakes after the fact because they have the numbers. But why wouldn't we aspire to a higher standard, members? Why wouldn't we try more diligently to do a better job of the budget analysis process?

I'll say to the new members that you may find, as I have, that one of the most frustrating things is when it comes time to deal with the budget. What you will find is that you have maybe seniors in your constituency and you have university students. What will happen is that in order to save time - and this government wants to turn the lights off in this building as quickly as they can - we split into two committees. If you're lucky enough to be in the committee upstairs, you're able to review the budget dealing with seniors, and if you're downstairs, you can only deal with the budget for postsecondary students. If you happen to have constituents who have issues in both of those budget areas, then you miss out. You can ask your questions down here, and you can tear upstairs. You can wave your hand furiously and try and get the chairman's attention, but tough; too late. There are nine other people already on the list, and they're going to turn the lights off upstairs at 10 o'clock, so you're not going to have time to be able to ask those questions there.

That's what's happening in this province, and we have seen the steady erosion of parliamentary democracy, the progressive diminution of the role and importance of individual MLAs. And probably the most eloquent testament to the dismantling of democracy in this province, if you'll forgive the hyperbole, is right here in the 2000-2001 supplementary estimates, general revenue fund. This is exhibit A. This is what tells us what's wrong with our budgetary process.

Mr. Speaker, those are the points I wanted to make, and I'm looking forward to further debate on this very important motion. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak on Government Motion 23 dealing with supplementary estimates.

I notice that the government has already committed close to a billion dollars over the budget that it presented just six, seven months ago. It's money that has been committed by the government without prior scrutiny by this Legislature. The supplementary budget estimates come to us as an afterthought, as something that has already happened, and the Legislature has absolutely no capacity to change either the numbers or the commitments that the government has made. This speaks to the low value that this government places on the debates that occur in this Legislature, and it's a sad commentary on a democratic body and the value that's associated with it by the government in power.

The billion dollar extra expenditures that are presented to us in this booklet show clearly that either the government didn't know what it was doing when it was presenting the budget to us or that it didn't listen to its civil service, who are expensive. We've been paying them quite a bit of money. I trust they're doing their job, but the decisions have to be made by the cabinet, by the Treasurer, and by the elected members on the government side.

4:50

Why there was no recognition in the budget that there will be upcoming expenditures - I can see some justification for spending more money in the area of Agriculture, Food and Rural

Development, as the drought perhaps could not have been predicted at the right time. But I also find that Infrastructure has got \$419 million extra. Why was there a problem with anticipating and with government in fact making commitments to spending this money when it was preparing the spring budget? There's no explanation for it. The money has been allocated. Similarly, in Health and Wellness we have known in this province for many years the chronic underfunding of health care . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, you're rising on something?

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. HANCOCK: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459, Relevance and Repetition. The motion is a motion to refer the estimates to Committee of Supply, and while the debate is interesting, it's more appropriate in Committee of Supply to talk about whether the numbers could have been brought forward earlier or those sorts of things. Really what we're debating is whether the estimates should be referred to Committee of Supply, which I think would call for a rather narrower discussion of the concept. Either the estimates should go to Committee of Supply or they shouldn't go to Committee of Supply for some reason. It's not that here's a whole bunch of estimates that are on the table now that shouldn't have been on the table or that the government shouldn't be spending or that the numbers are wrong.

Those are all issues to be debated in the Committee of Supply and when the appropriation act is brought forward. The motion before us is: should the estimates be referred to Committee of Supply? I think relevant discussion should be on that point.

THE SPEAKER: The point put forward by the hon. Government House Leader is certainly a valid one. This is a recommittal motion. The chair has been listening very attentively to the leader of the ND opposition, and I'm sure that before too long we'll reach that fork in the road where he'll tie it all together to make the argument to refer it to committee.

#### Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to come to the point. I'm glad that the hon. House leader did pose the statement in the form of a question. I'm trying to decide whether to support this motion or not, and I beg your permission to be able to state my reasons and make my observations before I come to a conclusion. I'm sure the hon. House leader on the government side doesn't want to stop debate in this Assembly or observations which are legitimate, which is our right to be able to make in the Assembly in representing our constituents. I'm not attributing to him any motives that he's trying to stop the debate, but it would appear that the consequence of what he is saying is to stop me from saying what my constituents certainly want me to be able to convey to my colleagues in the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, to return to my observations, to speak on the motion whether to refer it. I think we have to, of course, look at what the motion is about. In order to talk about the motion, whether it should be referred, you have to ask yourself: what is the motion about? The substance of the motion is something that we are able to speak to, and that's why I was referring to some of these numbers here. So if I may proceed.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, interestingly, Health and Wellness certainly won't have the ability, as I said, during this Assembly to

tell the government that its expenditures are being misspent because they're already spent. It comes to us after the fact. So why we are talking about the motion is that we've got to be able to say: well, look, what's this money about? They're contracting out. There's lots of money being spent on getting some of the medical procedures done at costs which are much higher than we would incur if we were to keep these surgeries and these medical procedures inside the public system. Clearly, it seems to me, the \$293 million of the \$500 million being spent now in supplementary estimates on health is designed to I guess repair some damage that the government might have concluded it sustained during the Bill 11 debate.

So I'm just raising these issues. We have, I think, two days to debate this, and we'll certainly go into this in more detail at that time. We'll have the opportunity at that time to ask more specific and detailed questions, but general observations I'm sure are in order.

This scale of overexpenditure appearing here in the form of supplementary estimates just three or four months before the next provincial election again suggests that it's not something that the government couldn't predict when it did. That is to say that these estimates are designed to achieve certain other political ends, and I guess that might be why the hon. House leader didn't want me to go into any details on why it is that I have some questions about whether or not I will support this motion.

I notice that again education is completely absent. If the government was really interested in fixing things, it knows that our students at postsecondary institutions are protesting about the ever increasing tuition fees and the debt burden as a result of this government's policies on this. There's no money in here. There's no afterthought. There's no attempt to be sensitive to the concerns and the demands that students are making, to put some money in here so the universities and colleges could be given some more money so that they could then go to the students and say, "Well, we are freezing tuition fees, and indeed we are ready to roll them back." If this government sees the significance of young Albertans being able to go to university and college and prepare for the 21st century, prepare for the information economy, prepare for entering a world in which we will be competitive and will make a statement that we as a society are behind our young people who are willing to take part in this competitive economy as they prepare through our schools and universities, there's no such indication here.

Similarly, there's lots of lip service paid to how we need to protect our children, how we need to support them when they're young, how important it is to spend money on them, that every \$1 spent is returned seven times over if we spend that money now. Is there any indication here that there's any attempt to spend any money to reduce class size? No, none at all. It really is not only what's there but also what's not there that speaks to how this government thinks about these crucial issues and concerns that Albertans have about their future, about their children's future, and about their institutions.

So in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, to be handed this document this afternoon, to say that all you have to do is say yes to it – we have spent the money. You go back to your constituents and tell them, "Well, I couldn't do anything about this." If they say, "Well, government is wasting money; what have you done for us?" what am I supposed to say when I go back to them? That I can't do anything? There is no opportunity for us to speak to these estimates at a point where we could convince this government to change its mind, so it's a fait accompli. It's simply an exercise in nothing.

We had the Legislature receive this bill with \$1 billion of Alberta citizens' money to spend, but we can't do anything to alter the government's mind on this, and that's what I find regrettable in this situation. So I certainly will be participating in the debate that will

take place over the next two days and make comments in more detail, but I do want to say on behalf of my constituents that this is not the right way to spend public money. Public funds must be spent in a way that's accountable. They must be committed so that the commitment itself is accountable to the Legislature and does not let us spend this money and then come back and say: "What can we do? We need the money now."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would rise to reinforce the point I was trying to make on a point of order, that the motion before us right now is to commit the estimates to Committee of Supply, and all of the talk that we've heard from the leader of the third party is presumably to suggest that we should not commit this to Committee of Supply. Committee of Supply is exactly where we examine the estimates in detail, exactly where he has the opportunity to raise questions and concerns of his constituents, exactly the place to examine in detail and to ask questions, exactly the place to get the information he's talking about. He's delaying the democratic process, delaying our opportunity to get to that process by debating whether they should be even committed.

5:00

Presumably, if he doesn't wish to send the estimates to Committee of Supply, he thinks we should pass them without that examination. Well, the members on this side of the House don't want to do that. The members on this side of the House want to get to Committee of Supply so that we can examine in detail whether these appropriations are appropriate, whether these estimates are the right way to spend the money, and to justify the need for this additional amount of Albertans' money being spent on these important priorities. So I fail to see why the members opposite would debate a motion to send this to the committee where the very examination they called for is allowed.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening with interest to the debate this afternoon on Government Motion 23 as proposed to the Assembly by the hon. Dr. West.

Now, we have to look, Mr. Speaker, at the whole process, and we have to look at the whole process as to how this quiet, comfortably coloured document has arrived on this hon. member's desk. I could look at the blue-gray colour – some people would describe it as gun-barrel blue – and this document is to have an impact on all Albertans.

What part of the process have the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar been denied? Many people – many people – come to the constituency office to discuss important issues of public policy. Some individuals even surprise me with their attendance at the constituency office, but others come and say to me: Mr. MacDonald, what's going on with all this sugar-daddy politics? This, Mr. Speaker, is what they're referring to: sugar-daddy politics. There's an election coming up, Mr. MacDonald, and you have no influence on where this money's being spent. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about this. He came up with sound suggestions, and I feel that before this is presented to me by the pages, I should as an elected representative have some input into this.

I have constituents who are very concerned about the state of the health care system. I see in this document there are many government MLAs – I counted them before, and it almost looked like a



make-work project – a lot of them in there. I believe there are six, Mr. Speaker, six. I cannot understand why I cannot have as other jurisdictions have – as a member of the loyal opposition – some input into this. As I said earlier, constituents have observations on health care. They have observations on schools. But do we get a chance? No, we do not. We do not get a chance to discuss this. It is just presented to us. It's a take it or leave it procedure.

Now, I could leave this Assembly in 25 minutes, and I could say to my constituents – and they would not believe this – the government has essentially brought forward a motion to spend a million dollars to improve the office of the Auditor General. Incredibly, Mr. Speaker, in my years in this Assembly I have seen four copies of the Auditor General's report. It is becoming one of my favourite reads. I like Truman Capote, but I'm beginning to like Peter Valentine a lot as well, because he is exposing what this government is mismanaging. I see that in here Peter Valentine is getting another million dollars. I see Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: \$100 million.

If I was to explain to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar that in the last hour this afternoon this document was presented to the Assembly – we are going to spend a lot of money. We only have to think, I believe, of the pop group the Barenaked Ladies and If I Had a Million Dollars, their hit song. It seems that is the only song the government is listening to, and they're practising sugar-daddy politics and throwing money at every problem. They're not thinking about this.

I'm looking forward to Committee of the Whole, because as I review this document, I see lots and lots of questions that I can ask on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. I can leave this Assembly and can say that there was a 39 percent increase in the last four years in government spending. We look at the total here that's close to a billion dollars in unscheduled spending that is going to allow for even more mismanagement by this government. I cannot understand why so many hon. members of this Assembly do not at this time want to have any further discussion on the proposed motion by the hon. Dr. West, because this is taxpayers' money, and we cannot have a complacent accounting system.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I shall cede the floor to another colleague. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to participate in this discussion this afternoon, but it appears that members of the opposition are bound and determined that we're going to have a debate on this debatable motion, so I thought I might as well participate.

I listened with interest to the last speaker. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of the individual's comments, I'm not sure whether he's for or against the motion before us, because he was urging the members to participate in the discussion on supplementary estimates, and I thought that's what this motion was all about. This motion is a request of the Assembly to approve the referral of all of the things that the member was talking about to Committee of the Whole, to Committee of Supply so that we can get into that very detailed discussion that the hon. member was talking about. So, frankly, it would seem to me, although I may have misunderstood him, that he was in fact speaking in favour of the motion that's before us at this point in time. That being the case, I can't understand why, if the government members are in favour of the motion and obviously the opposition members are in favour of the motion, why we don't just get on with it, pass the motion, and then get into Committee of

Supply and have this wonderful discussion that everyone is so looking forward to.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes I don't understand a lot of the intricate rules of this House, but this one is a very specific, very easy rule to understand. We have before us a very simple motion. The Provincial Treasurer has tabled supplementary estimates. He's introduced a motion that says: members of this House, there are some details, there's some discussion that needs to take place on these supplementary estimates. I propose that we send them off to Committee of Supply so that we can have that detailed discussion, and I ask that the members concur in this recommendation. Very simple, very straightforward. I think that we've had more than enough discussion on the issue, and, as I said, it appears that the opposition members are even now arguing in favour of the motion, so I would like to suggest that we get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

5:10

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate what the Member for Medicine Hat said, but I think my issue, more than the money that has gone to areas that are, I would say, for the most part needed, is with the process, that needs to be changed and addressed. This is one of the opportunities to speak to that.

As the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said, it comes here, and we're to vote on it. At no point is there a chance for us to be a part of that decision-making process unless I send a letter to the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Infrastructure and say: "Queen Street school is more than 55 years old. It's in desperate need of repair. It's been ignored forever. When are you going to act on it?" That's a letter, but that's hardly part of the decision-making process that goes . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: That's the school board's job.

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm glad the member brought it up. Queen Street school was priority 1 for the Parkland school board. They got priority 11 or 7 from Infrastructure. So don't say: talk to the school board. They've made it a priority, but it didn't happen.

Now, one might say that it's political posturing at certain points and places all over the province. If that's the truth, why aren't priorities considered when municipalities send them in and when school boards send them in? That should be the way it's done. An all-party committee could look at the budget requests and needs across this province. We have seen some areas get, maybe, overpasses where they didn't need them as desperately as other areas.

Of course this will eventually pass into committee. These moneys are spent. We have to pass it through this process. In fact, if we didn't have the supplementary budget, we probably wouldn't have a fall session in this Legislature, because it seems government members don't even want to be here. Fortunately, we at least have to be here for supplementary estimates. So we'll get to, oh, probably an hour's discussion on each one of these. That's a maybe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where are your members? Where are your members?

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that at some times I may have to speak for some members on that side. In fact, in this budget maybe an overpass at Brooks has been needed. Has that member had a chance to put in their priorities? They need an

overpass at highway 38 and highway 1. People are dying there. [interjection] Sorry; highway 36. Thank you for the correction. I'm glad you know where it is.

Highway 36 and highway 1: a dangerous intersection that the people of Brooks have been asking for. Did their member put this into the budget somewhere? Did you have input to this? Did you have a chance? He says: absolutely. I don't see it here.

So how do we deal with priorities? How about that Catholic school in Brooks? A crowded school. In fact, try passing someone on the stairwell in that school. It's dangerous. Two people can't fit on that stairwell going from one level of the school to the other. They need a new facility. They're terribly overcrowded. They've been offered the building next to them, which is an older county building and which is second choice at best. They really need a new school, a proper facility, but they'll have to make do with a second choice, where the kids won't have a track, won't have a gymnasium for who knows how long. So I'm wondering: did the Member for Strathmore-Brooks have input into this? It's not in here. How about the water quality in Gleichen? It's not in here. Those issues haven't been addressed. Certainly Queen Street school hasn't been addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I feel a level of frustration, and obviously priorities from different members' constituencies are not being addressed. So how does this process work? Do you look at: gee whiz; which MLA might be in political trouble? Do we build a school there? Is that what we do? Is that how it happens? [interjection] They say: you know better than that, Colleen. I'd like it to be proven. Regretfully, I don't see that happening.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo talked about an all-party budget committee. That's what this Legislature should look at, but when they have a strong majority government, they don't think it's worth listening to the opposition. But you know what? That's then a sign of not caring. I know I shouldn't use the word arrogant, but that would symbolize that to me. So I would venture to say that we're missing the boat on this process.

If it isn't sugar-daddy politics, if it isn't vote-buying, then I think this process should be cleared up and changed, because it certainly looks that way. One person said to me, in fact in Brooks: "You know my 300 bucks that I'm getting back from the government? I'd much rather see my money go to that overpass, because I know someone who died there. If that intersection were safer, there would be fewer deaths." You know what? I know that's an issue in many places across our province.

So how do the priorities get to the table? Municipalities have sent in their priorities, and they get ignored. School boards have sent in their priorities, and they get ignored. Obviously MLAs send in their priorities. Do they get ignored? How does that happen? Where do the dollars get spent in that supplementary budget? Is it about vote-buying? Because if it's not about vote-buying, then this process isn't good. This process encourages the idea that we vote buy.

MR. DICKSON: It encourages sloppy administration.

MRS. SOETAERT: It encourages sloppy administration. In fact, it's interesting. I'm hoping, when we get to the Infrastructure debates, that we will have a list of what was actually done. I'm hoping that the minister will provide that for us, because it says: so much on school buildings. Which ones and where? Were they the school boards' priorities? That's what I'd like to see.

Quite honestly, it shouldn't be done this way. These priorities should be set long in advance, and they should be fairly and equitably done across the province. You shouldn't buy votes with pavements and school buildings and hospitals. What we should do

is govern well enough to provide for the needs of all Albertans, not based on where you live or who you vote for but on the needs of a community. You know what? It could happen under a different budget process. It absolutely could. I don't see that happening here. I just don't.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've covered most of the things I wanted to mention. I also wanted to mention that, interestingly enough, I haven't seen in Justice—does the minister not realize that we're very desperately short of police across this province? I've heard complaints from municipalities across the province that they have the same amount of police force now they had in 1986, and their population has doubled. That isn't being addressed. So I would suggest that that issue isn't even addressed in this, and it should well be.

I will probably support it going to committee because the money is spent. So in order to at least ask questions and hopefully get some answers—I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, I don't like this process. You know, when you're in here, those are the rules for now. We can always work at changing those rules, and that's why I'm speaking to this motion. I'd like to see the rules changed on the way we go about this whole budget process. I would urge all members to have a rethink about this process, because I will have to hold my nose to vote to support to move this into supply because the whole process is wrong.

I will support the spending of most of this if it's clearly explained to me. Some ministers are very good about explaining where the money has gone and how the priorities were set up. From some, on the other hand, you don't get that kind of explanation. I would suggest that members on both sides of the House should have a little problem with that. I would suggest that they all should have a look at that.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time to speak to the motion, and hopefully the budget process will change. It certainly will under the next Liberal government. So with those comments, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion.

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

5:20

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad for these few minutes I'm going to get to speak to Motion 23, which is to refer the 2000-01 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund and all matters connected therewith to the Committee of Supply. Interestingly, there's actually been some debate this afternoon, some input from both sides, which is a good thing to happen in this Assembly and one that I'm pleased to participate in and encourage.

In the four years that I've been here, every year there's a supplementary supply budget that's bigger than the one before. I think this is a question of process, and that's why I'm taking this opportunity to stand up and debate during this referral motion, Government Motion 23. This seems to be the only opportunity that I'm going to get to be able to talk about the process that this government chooses to use in how they have input. My colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert talked a lot about who actually gets input on this. Where does the information go? How do we know that it was considered or not considered? It is very much a closed process, and I don't think that's appropriate when we're talking about the resources, the tax money, even the oil and gas royalties. They belong to all Albertans, and I think this needs to be a more open process so that they understand and frankly could have some input into how that money is being designated.

I believe that supplementary supply should be unexpected, unforeseen—let me put it that way—expenses. I heard my colleague

from Calgary-Buffalo allude to this before as well. It would certainly make sense to me if there were a supplementary supply on costs incurred for fighting forest fires that could not be anticipated in advance. Now, we know that every summer there are going to be forest fires. There should be some money in the budget to cover a reasonable expenditure, an average expenditure for forest fires. But if it was an extraordinary year, then I would expect to see a supplementary supply estimate for that.

MRS. SOETAERT: Or a drought.

MS BLAKEMAN: A drought is another suggestion. Or floods or any other kind of calamity that was unforeseen. But it stretches believability to think that money going into health care, given the crisis that's developed there, is unforeseen. It stretches credulity to believe that there isn't money in infrastructure given the state of our roads, our buildings, our schools, highways, provincial buildings. I mean, come on; of course there's supposed to be money spent there. Why is it now unforeseen money?

Now, probably what's really going on here is that it's bonanza money. Other people have talked about sugar-daddy money and vote-buying money and all of that sort of thing. I'm not saying that I'm not pleased to see that there is additional money coming into this government's coffers in this fiscal year. Of course I'm just as delighted as everyone else to see it. But the point is: why was it so unforeseen? Why did we have the previous Provincial Treasurer being the king of supplementary supply? Why would he want to earn that title?

I come from the nonprofit sector, and we're expected to produce one-, three-, and five-year budgets in the nonprofit sector. There's a clear expectation that the figures you come up with are based on what you expect to spend based on what your projects are – and that requires planning ahead – and also what you expect to bring in from revenue. Again, you've got to be as close to the mark as you can be. But that just doesn't seem to apply in this case. So what the government enforces on every nonprofit that applies to it for funding, it doesn't apply to itself. This seems to be: well, whatever; what the heck. It's a totally different set of rules. I won't go into what percentage point the previous Treasurer was out by, but it was something astronomical.

So why are we debating this motion at this time? Because I don't have any other time to talk about the process. When we're actually debating supplementary supply, I'm supposed to be talking about the numbers. I'm supposed to be questioning whether it was good value spent here, if it should have been spent there, or why wasn't it spent on something else? I don't have another opportunity to question the way this government develops its budget and particularly the way this government develops its supplementary supply estimates. I don't get another opportunity to do that.

You know, this afternoon the Speaker in his usual wise way ruled on a Standing Order 30 and a Standing Order 40 in which there was an attempt to debate electrical deregulation in this province. People were frustrated. This was the only chance we had. That's why we wanted to do it. Well, it's the same situation for us here today. What other instance do I get? As a member representing 38,000 people in Edmonton-Centre, what other opportunity do I get to come forward and question this process, to say: where do I get input on this? You explain to me the choices you've made here and why you make them this way so I can explain them to the people that live in Edmonton-Centre and are asking me these questions. This is my opportunity to debate the whys and the wherefores and the nickels

and the dimes, although in this case we'll soon be talking about the millions and the billions.

You know, there's a level of frustration from this government that I see over and over again whenever anyone wants to question the process, but do you know what? This is the place to question the process. This is what democracy is about. Democracy is cumbersome, sometimes it's noisy, and it's certainly time consuming. That's okay. That's what it's supposed to be to keep an even balance. We don't have an even balance. We don't have a give-and-take in this province right now. We have a government that manages to set a process that is behind closed doors.

AN HON. MEMBER: Smug.

MS BLAKEMAN: Smug. Thank you.

Now, they're supposedly wanting to increase the role of the private member: more for the private member to do, more input from the private member. Do you know what? Private members exist on both sides of the House, and what we have here is private members that are all assigned to committees for which they are paid additional remuneration as well, and they get to go behind closed doors and develop whatever these little processes are that the rest of us don't get to be involved in. Well, all of us were elected here. There should be respect for everyone being elected here, and all of us should be involved in that process.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has raised over and over again in this House a more democratic, more legislatively honourable way to go about this process, and that is, frankly, by having a legislative committee, an all-party committee that starts to work on this budget from way back. But do you know what? All those questions that we have to raise by using motions like Motion 23 to get the discussion out there could have been dealt with in a committee in a much more informal way, but the time still has to be put in. So it either happens there or it happens here. Right now it's happening here.

MRS. SOETAERT: You've got two minutes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Good. I've still got two minutes. I have more points to make.

I think it's important that we do take the opportunity to question what's going on particularly around these supplementary supply budgets, which have now become the norm, a way of life with this government. I had an opportunity to attend a private members' conference this summer. I didn't want to go originally, but I'm really glad I did because it put me in touch with a number of other private members from other provinces across Canada. I learned a lot about how narrowly focused this Legislative Assembly is. I can see the Speaker getting ready to rise. Just a few more minutes. Okay; good.

When I talked to other private members from other provinces in Canada and from the federal government and from our three territories now, it really drove home for me how restricted this all is.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before adjourning the Assembly this afternoon, might I draw to your attention, please, in the members' gallery Mrs. Sharon Lougheed and Allison Lougheed. Allison is the daughter of the distinguished Member for Clover-Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, and Sharon is the wife.

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

