

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 18, 2002** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 02/03/18
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions** **Financial Planning for Retirement**

502. Ms Kryczka moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take on a leadership role to encourage Albertans of all ages to assume personal responsibility for planning their financial security in retirement.

[Debate adjourned March 11: Mr. Bonner speaking]

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this evening to continue debate on Motion 502. Now, when debate ended on the last particular opportunity, I was talking about the contradictions that do appear to be happening and how, although I support this motion, it seems that it is at odds with what we as a government are doing right now when it comes to planning for our financial future.

We have in this province experienced just some incredible years of revenue generation over the last three or four years. Last year we did have the biggest surplus we've ever had. This year we are forecast to have the second largest revenue that we've ever had. Yet we are making cuts to essential services. Earlier today in this Assembly I talked about the road builders of Alberta and how, because we don't have sustainable, equitable, and predictable funding, that particular group is going to have to lay off a certain number of their skilled labour. They certainly are going to have some of their member companies in financial difficulty because there is not sustainable funding. We are going to have a situation where until they see the budget tomorrow, they certainly are not going to be able to do their planning and prepare for the upcoming construction season. Now, one thing that we are fortunate for: the weather has certainly co-operated in regards to holding up the construction or early construction this spring.

But to get more to the essence of the bill and why I do support it, it was of great interest to me when I was doing some research to speak on this particular motion that approximately only 30 percent of Canadians contribute to an RRSP, and I pointed out in the debate last week that for those contributing to RRSPs, certainly the more they earn the more they contribute. So a greater percentage of Canadians at upper levels of income contribute to RRSPs than those at lower levels. That certainly makes sense because those people who are at the lower levels of income, although they are a greater percentage of the population, their precious few dollars are spoken for many different reasons, whether to run households or whatever.

I certainly do support the fact that we are urging Canadians and particularly Albertans to get involved in some type of savings for their future. I certainly am encouraging them to start saving as early as they can, because when they do start earlier, they're going to have much more in savings for when they do retire.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker – and I see my time is out – I will take my seat and let others continue. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, in the few minutes remaining.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity this evening to join the debate, even if it's a short opportunity, on Motion 502. I'd really like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-West for taking the initiative to introduce this important, thoughtful motion.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some of the motions and bills we introduce in this House are aimed at effecting immediate changes which Albertans can and will experience in short order. Others operate along a much greater time line, and the intended results may not be felt for several years. The theory of Motion 502 is to help people in the long term, and it will have a very positive effect on people's lives. This motion is not dangerous. It is not scandalous. It is not a scheme, as the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods would have had you believe, and the hon. Member for Calgary-West has good intentions in putting this motion forward. In general, current incentives and opportunities for savings are primarily present for those in middle- and high-income groups. Yet, as the hon. Member for Calgary-West told the House earlier, the ages of people retiring in 1966 were 58.5 for women and 61.4 for men, and the goal today for retirement for many is 55.

Mr. Speaker, my view of this motion is not, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre suggested, that it be enforced with punishment and fines. The beauty of this motion is that it is about educating people with financial planning for their retirement. It is a very positive motion, as it encourages people to be responsible and self-reliant, and the government's own research suggests that all Albertans could be doing more to save for their retirement. Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that Albertans need more information to help them to determine their financial needs and realistically plan for retirement. We can assist by taking on the leadership role necessary to encourage increased financial planning, and I am hopeful that doing so will not only have a beneficial impact on our province, but more importantly it will ensure that people have an excellent quality of life in their retirement.

It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I will vote in favour of Motion 502. To my hon. colleague from Calgary-West: I take my hat off to you for bringing this motion forward, and I would encourage all members in this Assembly to do the same and to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: There being no other speakers, then, I will call on, in the few moments that remain and in the five minutes that is allowed, the hon. Member for Calgary-West to conclude debate on this motion.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, before my own personal comments I would like to acknowledge and thank some of the many people who willingly assisted in providing information for the preparation of Motion 502: Frank Ostlinger, government members' research; Terry Chugg, assistant deputy minister, Department of Seniors; Bonnie Brooks, certified financial planner, CIBC Wood Gundy; Stephen Kushner, president, Merit Contractors Association; Joanne Abram, general manager, Alberta Insurance Council; Wayne Taylor, president, the Canadian Association of Pre-retirement Planners, or CAPP, Alberta chapter; and Mary Holder, lifestyle choice consultant with a professional retirement designation from CAPP. I also thank my colleagues who spoke to Motion 502: the MLA for Leduc, the MLA for Red Deer-North, and the MLA for Calgary-Cross.

To summarize briefly, Mr. Speaker, Motion 502 is all about preparing now for our future and maintaining at the minimum our present high quality of life of which we are so proud as our aging population increases as projected in the next 10, 20, and 30 years. Demographics is the driver, and it is a science. Seniors are now 1 in 10, or 10 percent of the population and by 2030 will likely be 1 in 4, or 25 percent of the population. Seniors are living longer, which raises very valid concerns. First of all, what kind of lifestyle do I really want when I finally do retire? Next, will I be able to save enough money? Lastly, will CPP and other pensions be adequate?

Alberta is seen as a leader in Canada in aging population work, Mr. Speaker. There are major reports: the long-term care review; the governmentwide study on the impact of an aging population; and presently the cross-ministry SPI, or seniors' policy initiative, that involves 18 government departments. These three initiatives support the need for Albertans to prepare for their financial security and that government should have a role to play. It is very important for us as government MLAs to realize that the government role Motion 502 advocates is not necessarily about more government money. In fact, there is definite potential for less government funding.

8:10

The government role is about policies and programs more than legislation and those programs communicated through the present government framework. It's about working with private and public sectors and with other levels of government, and it's about financial planning education using quality information, and government can lead by example and also can assist in a research dimension.

Before finally closing, I would like to recommend that government could innovatively address the needs of individuals with little or no access to private pensions or other retirement savings arrangements. I mention that Saskatchewan has the SPP, or Saskatchewan pension plan, which is voluntary and available to anyone 18 to 69 years old. Eligibility is not dependent on residency, income, employment status, gender, or membership in other plans. If and when this government should review the future of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, a very small amount could start an Alberta pension plan, a plan that works for Albertans, but mostly it encourages lower-income Albertans to save for their future. Lone-parent families have the lowest median net worth, with an estimate as low as \$17,900. Alberta needs a flexible, portable, provincial plan that can accommodate their ability to make payments if and when they are able to.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, there are two key advantages or outcomes of Motion 502. Motion 502 would maximize the number of older Albertans who live in dignity, are financially independent, are both mentally and socially well as a result, and who are willing to use their life savings in order to give themselves a better quality of life. Motion 502 would minimize the number of older Albertans who depend on government assistance for income; for example, the Alberta seniors benefit as we know it today and other pensions.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this Assembly to support Motion 502. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried unanimously]

Free Admission to Museums and Historic Sites

503. Mrs. O'Neill moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to offer free admission to Albertans one day each month to the province's museums and historic sites.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to begin the debate on Motion 503 today. Those of us who call ourselves Albertans are truly fortunate people. These days when we hear others and at times also ourselves praise our province, we are perhaps more likely to think about things such as how well we have weathered the current economic slowdown and that we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country. Maybe we are reminded of the vast deposits of oil and gas with which our province has been blessed, or maybe we feel buoyed by the recent successes of trade missions to faraway nations.

There is, however, another reason why we are a fortunate people, and that is Alberta's history. I can think of few Canadian jurisdictions that have such a long and truly fascinating history as Alberta does. Quite frankly, ours is a spectacular history. Alberta's history, of course, predates the birth of the land now known as Alberta. It goes beyond the European settlers, the missionaries, and fur trappers who began the process of taming this wild land. The indigenous tribes who came before them weren't the first either. No, Mr. Speaker, to fully understand just how long or old our history is, we need to look at a time whose unit of measure is millions of years, not just one or two million years but about 75 millions of years ago. That's when dinosaurs roamed the earth, and many of them, like we do now, called Alberta home.

At that time, Mr. Speaker, much of Alberta was covered by river deltas, swamps, and flood plains extending east to a shallow sea, but as time passed, mud, silt, and sand were laid down in layers, and dinosaurs, ancient plants, and other animals died and were buried in the sediments.

In the Drumheller badlands, however, the layers that originally buried the Cretaceous sediments are absent. They were stripped off by Ice Age glaciers, which left their own layer of sediments. Floodwater from melting glaciers carved out the Red Deer River valley 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. The erosion continues, creating coulees, rills, sinkholes, and hoodoos along the river from the city of Red Deer to the Saskatchewan border.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller is, of course, named after Joseph Burr Tyrrell. It is but one of many museums and heritage sites throughout our great province. A few weeks ago I spoke about our provincial heritage sites on CBC's *Provincial Affairs* program, and during the program I said that each of Alberta's many museums and historic sites tells a story of its own and that together they all tell the story of Alberta. They tell us the story of our ancestors, and one day they will tell that story to our children and to our children's children.

It is because I believe our museums, our parks, and our heritage sites are vital to Albertans and because I would like to enable as many Albertans as possible to visit these sites that I have decided to introduce Motion 503. It is imperative that Alberta's history is readily available to all Albertans. By offering free admission one day a month to Albertans, the province's museums and historic sites would become more accessible to a larger portion of Albertans. Through Motion 503 the government would be able to foster not only an increased sense of community and pride in Alberta but also a renewed interest in provincial history. Obviously the Alberta government has an interest in preserving the province's history. Indeed, the stated goal of the historic sites and cultural facilities branch of Alberta Community Development is

to improve the quality of life for Albertans through the preservation and presentation of, and promotion of appreciation for, Alberta's diverse natural, cultural and historical resources.

The government values these sites and has an interest in preserving our history for all time and for all Albertans. I believe we must also ensure that they are accessible to all Albertans and anyone else who's interested in our rich and varied history.

Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about here is enabling Albertans to gain access free of charge to the province's museums and heritage sites one day a month, 12 days each year. Twelve days out of 365 is not much. It represents about 3 percent. For those Albertans who due to economic circumstances might not otherwise be able to visit a museum or heritage site, one day a month would mean so much more. Indeed, for the institutions that would choose to offer free admission, Motion 503 could offer an opportunity to expand their markets by attracting segments of the population previously not in the habit of visiting the province's museums and historic sites.

The opposite view is that offering free admission one day a month would have a harmful impact on the institutions who would choose to do so. To me this is an overly pessimistic view. I prefer to take a more optimistic attitude and would like to suggest that by offering free admission one day a month, there will be a ripple effect that will be highly beneficial to patrons and the institutions alike. Quite obviously there will be no revenues from admission on the days when no admission is charged. However, people must eat, and if there is some sort of food service on the premises, it is likely that visitors would buy food and drink in the course of their visits. The income from food and beverage sales could more than offset the lost admission revenues. Moreover, when you consider how highly regarded our province's museums and heritage sites are, you know that people are going to have something to talk about when they leave. They're going to tell their friends and neighbours, and some of them will undoubtedly be intrigued enough to want to go to see for themselves what is so interesting, and they would pay admission. While visiting, they may also pick up a few souvenirs, further offsetting revenue losses.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, Alberta does have a unique and rich history, one which we can all experience today, millions of years after it first began, by visiting a local museum or historic site. Whether it is the dinosaurs from millions of years ago in Drumheller and Brooks or the Sixties exhibit at the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton or my favourite, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, designated as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1981, these and other museums and heritage sites and institutions are all part of Alberta's rich, unique, and vibrant history. We know their significance, their wonderment, and their magnificence. Let us make it possible for all Albertans to do the same and to make our past part of their lives. I ask for your support of Motion 503.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for St. Albert having put the time and thought into bringing forward this motion. I'll just read it into the record so I've got it in my *Hansard*: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to offer free admission to Albertans one day each month to the province's museums and historic sites."

I can appreciate that the Member for St. Albert would like to encourage more Albertans to go to our provincial museums and historic sites. They really are quite wonderful. I certainly haven't been to all of them – I think there are 270 museums – but the ones that I have been to have been pretty neat. Each of them in its own way has found a niche.

Now, what is interesting – and I did a bit of research and called around to a few sources to find out whether this was feasible and whether it was needed. The reaction that I got was that most museums and historic sites already have some sort of free day, that

was put through by their own board of directors or a decision made some time ago. So it's either a free day a month or a free day a week or an evening. I think at the Edmonton Art Gallery it was Tuesday evenings maybe.

So there has always been an understanding from the museum and the arts community that they wanted to be accessible to the general public and they didn't want to stop anyone from coming who really wanted to. There was always an opportunity presented for those that didn't have the personal finances to be able to pay the admission. Originally the admission fee was pretty low. It was 50 cents, \$1, \$1.50, and then it slowly had to get higher. I'm going to look at the current minister of agriculture and ask her to cast her mind back. I think we changed over the system to the friends-of groups, that that legislation was passed in 1998. No; she's not looking at me. I think it was in 1998 that in fact the management of our museums and historic sites changed through an act of legislation here in Alberta.

At the time I had a lot of concerns about it, and I still do, but essentially what happened was that the government used to run and pay for all of the sites that are there, and in this 1997 or 1998 legislation the management of the institutions was transferred to the friends-of groups. They would now be responsible for the hiring of everybody but the strictly technical staff. So, for example, at the Tyrrell Museum, which the Member for St. Albert brought up, the curator, the professional staff, would still be paid by the Department of Community Development, but everybody else, the people that take tickets and work in the gift shop and sweep the floors and do the bookkeeping, all of those positions would be paid by the friends-of organization, and the friends-of organization would take all of the revenue sources. So they took the gate receipts and the gift shop and the restaurant and the annual membership fees. Any of those possible revenue sources went to the friends-of, and that's how they were supposed to be able to pay for all of these other positions.

So there was sort of a downloading but also a switch in who was ultimately responsible for managing these organizations. Of course, at the point where the friends-of groups are responsible for keeping these museums open, they really had to be very tight about their revenue sources. The reaction I had back was a slight caution from some of them saying, "Well, how would we be required to do this, because these revenue sources are pretty important to us; for example, we wouldn't want to be asked to have a free day on, like, July 1," which is a big day for people attending these kinds of tourist attractions and family recreational opportunities. As I said, many of them have already set up and have been running – actually, ever since they started to charge admission, they've had a corresponding free day or free night or free part of the day where people could still get in and see the exhibit.

I'm hoping that when the member does her five-minute wrap-up – and I guess that would be possibly this week or, if not, next week – she can answer where the impetus for this motion came from. Was there a request from the community? Was there a particular museum that was asking her to do this? Many of the ones that I spoke to and even the umbrella organizations are saying: "It's already happening. We're managing it as it works for us. Why do you want to legislate it?" So that's the question there.

Again, I'll go back and look at the whole concept of management and money being earned. I'm looking to address a couple points that the Member for St. Albert made about expanding markets and revenue losses. Prior to the 1980s any of the museums and historic sites that we had had free admission. That's when these sites were really being developed. Some of them did introduce admission charges throughout the '80s, but as I said, there was always a corresponding time set aside where the admission was free. We have continued to charge admission fees, and those have increased.

I noticed that in one of the government documents – it could have been *Measuring Up* – there's actually a fee schedule where they're anticipating the increase in the admission rates for a number of their larger institutions and the family rates. I think that in a lot of cases the family rate would now be up to \$20 or \$25 for some of the larger institutions, and that would be considering that it was a family of at least four, and anything above that, then, makes it a deal. If you're under that, it's not such a deal.

Certainly some of the museums and historic sites have always offered discounts or incentives – two for one, or 50 percent off after 4 o'clock, that sort of thing – to encourage people to come in and take advantage of what they're offering. Again, they're wondering why there would be a kind of broad-brush approach suggested by the member when they're essentially already doing this or trying to deal with their finances. A number of them were really cautious about the effect on their finances, and when we now have these friends-of-groups that are responsible and have been put in a position of responsibility by the government, they're kind of nervous. They know that there's no more money coming. So, on the one hand, potentially if this motion were passed, the government would be telling them, "You're to give them a free day, but at the same time it's your responsibility to keep this organization or museum running in the black, and we're not going to give you any money if you're not in the black." So it puts them in a tough position. They would be mandated to give up some of their revenue, but they're still held responsible for not going in the hole. So you can see why some of them were a little cautious about this idea.

8:30

You know, I think everybody's first reaction to this is that people don't go to museums because it's too expensive and if we made them free or we made a free day, then more people would go. In fact, what I was getting back from some of the museum people was that there are these free days for people who really are too poor and who really do want to come, and they've always taken advantage of that. It seems to be more a matter of: do people have time in their lives to take the time out to go to the museum, whether it's an art gallery or the Red Deer museum? They've got a lot of great exhibits down there, really innovative ones, actually. I've driven to Red Deer to go to the Red Deer museum exhibits. It's very innovative programming there.

I went off on a tangent, and now I've totally forgotten where I was. I shouldn't get off on a tangent. Oh, time, do people have the time to go to these exhibits?

The second thing that was raised was transportation.

MS CARLSON: You've only 10 minutes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Only 10 minutes? Shoot.

Thank you.

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

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak in favour today of Motion 503, provincial heritage sites accessibility. It's the intent of Motion 503 to increase Albertans' accessibility to Alberta's museums and heritage sites by offering free admission on one day of each month. By doing this, we can remove one of the barriers, the financial barrier, that keeps some Albertans from experiencing our rich and unique history. Equally important, it will also serve to get more people into our treasured sites and museums and revive those people's interest in the history of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support Motion 503 because I think it gives this government a great opportunity to ensure that Albertans will realize the heritage of this province, especially, to me, the thousands of people that are moving into this province. It hopefully will encourage them to become more aware of this wonderful place.

I'm a proud fourth-generation Albertan. My grandmother was born in Edmonton in 1897 to parents who were here long before that. I was just recently reading some of Alex Mair's stories about Edmonton. My great-grandmother's name was Mowat, and it's going to be really interesting for me. It's a funny thing about getting older. You start to do this roots kind of thing, going back in history. During the Riel rebellion, when they were very nervous here in Edmonton about being attacked, a Mowat road by horse to Calgary to get the military up here. So I thought: my great-grandmother's name is Mowat, and this was a Mowat, and there weren't very many people in Edmonton at that time, so, my goodness, maybe it was my family that did that.

You know, people here don't know the history of this province, and that really saddens me. Also, as a longtime educator it's really bothered me that we haven't done enough in teaching our kids about the history of Alberta. So I think that this motion will serve to give the opportunity to educate Albertans on our beautiful province.

Alberta is a land of many tales, and I wonder how many in this room have read the McDougall diaries. You won't get over the excitement, the history, the tales. It just is riveting. And how many in here have read the biography of the great Chief Crowfoot? It again is an amazing story.

We're a land where once the dinosaurs ruled. The Member for Edmonton-Centre talks about Red Deer and the Tyrrell museum and where the First Nations people hunted and where the province began amidst great fanfare and triumph nearly a hundred years ago, where we held our heads high during good times and bad times and where we've risen above adversity. They talk about the Dirty Thirties – and I wasn't quite old enough to be there – to the world wars.

This is a rich province, a province rich in history, and I believe that we should offer 12 free days a year as incentive for people to get an experience of Alberta's past and to think about its future.

I was really interested in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre's comments about the number of museums and sites now that do have something in their programs during the year to give people an opportunity to experience some of these places, but through this legislation we can do more. Some argue that if we pass this motion, this will hurt revenue from museums and other sites, but I disagree with this argument. People who take advantage of the free day will spend money just getting to the destination, and if they have children with them, they're going to spend money on food and in the gift shop and so on. I believe they'll ultimately bring more business for the museums and heritage sites.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that offering a free day will be one of the best advertising ploys and moneymakers that our heritage sites and museums can use. On the free day hopefully someone will go to a museum or a heritage site who usually wouldn't go there. When they experience the museum or site, they're going to enjoy it, and they're going to share the experience with their friends and recommend that they go. Hopefully there's that kind of spin-off with the rest of it. Their friends are going to go, and it goes on and on and on. They'll have a remarkable experience whether it's the art gallery or one of the great historic sites.

I believe that our museums and heritage sites will become far more popular and successful because of Motion 503. I know that the hon. minister for economic development and tourism – we talk about this all the time. This will hopefully be fulfilling the Travel Alberta theme. Right at home here we're going to be visiting our sites

instead of leaving the province or going across the border to spend the Canadian peso.

Motion 503 gives Albertans the opportunity to develop a greater sense of pride for Alberta. That is to say, if a person goes to a historical site, for instance Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, that person cannot leave the site without some sort of feeling of wonder and amazement. I wonder how many people in this room, in this Legislature, in this Assembly, have been to Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are a lot of Albertans that do not take advantage of the museums and historical sites that are around Alberta. Motion 503 gives us an opportunity to get the word out to all Albertans that there are incredibly interesting places to visit in this province, and the knowledge that can be gained from them is immense.

I also feel that offering one free day a month will not only stimulate interest in Alberta's heritage sites and museums but also in the friends programs that are related to the sites. For instance, the Head-Smashed-in Buffalo Jump world heritage site has a friends society which raises money for the betterment of the establishment. The more people that belong to the society and contribute towards the site, the better it is for all organizations involved. If we encourage people to visit museums and heritage sites, more people will certainly become interested in joining the friends societies and contributing to the sites. This would increase the amount of funding that a site has to use for improvements. The benefits that could be reaped from such support could prove to be one of the best things that has happened to sites and museums around Alberta in a long time.

Funding for our museums and heritage sites is tight these days, especially with the economic situation as it is. Museums and historical sites need to get more people into their establishments so that interest will grow and the money will flow. The more people that experience our province, the better it is for our province. I believe that Motion 503 will be extremely successful in starting a new interest in our heritage and culture.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of other reasons why one free day a month would be beneficial. Some of the less fortunate people in society would be given the opportunity to take part in experiencing Alberta's rich history. I believe that a free day would bring in many people from all sorts of backgrounds, but I believe that most of the people who would take advantage of this day would be people who would not normally go to a museum or a heritage site, and these are the people we really want to come. That is one thing that we cannot lose sight of. Having one free day a month gives some people who might not be able to go on a regular day an opportunity to go out and see the history of our province. It gives all Albertans a chance to study our rich past and gives them the opportunity to ponder our future.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Confucius, "Study the past if you would divine the future." I am glad the Member for St. Albert is giving some the opportunity to study the history of our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:40

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a few comments about Motion 503, the free admission to the province's museums and historic sites. This is a motion that I can certainly support. When we do look at the whole issue of tourism in this province and the fact that we want tourism to grow in this

province to, I believe, somewhere around the \$6 billion range by the year 2005, then certainly we have to look at more reasons than just this motion as to why people are not visiting our museums.

One of the major reasons – and I think that if we ask the hon. member from Lac La Biche, he would certainly tell us in a second exactly what the problem is in this province. It's the fact that with so many of these sites we have to travel such enormous distances to get there. I think back to when I was a grade 8 teacher and earth science was a major part of our curriculum. It was a three and a half hour trip for us to take our students down to the Royal Tyrrell Museum, and I can certainly say that our biggest cost was not the admission price. It was transportation. Of course, any of you that have ever traveled with any children know that the food costs are enormous, and I'm sure the museum did very well when we were there.

The biggest costs here are certainly not the admission costs, and if this is going to enhance our museums, if it is going to keep our museums operating and running, if we are not going to have a situation like we have in Cochrane with the Western Heritage museum, then, Mr. Speaker, I have no trouble supporting this motion.

We do have some incredible, incredible sites in this province. Some of them are heritage sites, and when we couple that with the gems we have for mountain parks, then certainly we do have a bright future when we look at tourism. As well, when we look at tourism, the challenges that face our museums are the same challenges that face tourism. We have in this province a number of gateway cities where people enter the province, whether it's by plane, usually by car, sometimes by train, but once we get out of that Edmonton-Calgary-Banff corridor, then it becomes our great distances that are the major stumbling blocks to us attracting people here.

We also know that it is very difficult to attract new tourists from within the province. Therefore I think what I would like to see as well, Mr. Speaker – and certainly we will find out tomorrow in the budget – is whether in fact we are going to be committed in this province to tourism, whether we are going to be committed as a province to keeping these fabulous facilities open and operating and affordable for all people, not only our own citizens of Alberta.

There are just some incredible circle routes that we can have in this province, and there are more and more being developed all the time. It's amazing when I look at this that, for example, we don't see any mention here of, you know, tourism up in Fort McMurray, again because we don't have the infrastructure there.

AN HON. MEMBER: We do so. The interpretive centre is there.

MR. BONNER: The interpretive centre is very good, but again it certainly has not been developed to the point that it could be. And, you know, through the St. Paul-Lac La Biche area of this province we have incredible history. I think that Lac La Biche as a small community in this province probably has more firsts than any other small community. I think this is where the first grain in this province was grown if I'm not mistaken. So we do have a very, very rich history, but we certainly do, Mr. Speaker, have to be committed to preserving it, and if this motion in any way will help to keep those museums open, then certainly I would support it.

As well, we also have to realize that there are trade-offs whenever we do offer free admission. Like, we still have to pay the staff that is there that particular day. We still have to pay the janitorial services. We certainly have to hope that if the food facilities on those sites are busier, some of those profits do go back into the facility.

We have a lot of challenges in our tourism industry, and in order

for us to develop that industry, then we here in the Legislature have to be committed to putting those dollars in which not only are going to help sustain these facilities but are going to attract the necessary tourists to those facilities. So as I wind down my comments here on this particular bill, I would certainly hope that all members of this Assembly would support this bill. We have an enormously rich history, and apart from the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller, it is a relatively new history when we look at this province.

So with those comments I will take my seat and listen to other comments by other hon. members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to join the debate on Motion 503 this evening. As Albertans we are very privileged to live in a province of such unmatched beauty. My hometown is Calgary. To stand in the shadow of the snow-capped Rocky Mountains or to experience the tranquility of looking out over the rolling hills of the prairies as a chinook warms you makes you realize how truly fortunate we are to live in Alberta, to be Albertans, to behold the Rockies or to be swept away by the big skies of the prairies.

Mr. Speaker, this is only half of the story. The unmatched beauty of our province has a counterpart in Alberta's fascinating history. The more you think about it, you will realize our history is as diverse as it is long, as it is remarkable. The hon. Member for St. Albert has introduced a motion which I think is a wonderful initiative to enable more Albertans to experience our province's history. I applaud her vision and commitment to our heritage. We have a responsibility to make sure that our heritage remains vibrant. When a society's history becomes irrelevant to its citizens, it is all but a certainty that the society is headed for difficult times. To be without history is demoralizing for one. We all have a need to feel like we belong.

A week ago I had the honour of attending a luncheon hosted by the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to welcome diplomats from Estonia. I was told that one of the first things that the Soviet Union did upon invading the countries that became its republic was to Russify those countries. This was done by moving large numbers of Russians to countries like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, for example. They brought with them their own traditions, their own cultures, and in many cases ran the local culture off the road, so of speak. Lest we think that such things have occurred only in faraway places, Mr. Speaker, we must acknowledge that many indigenous tribes of North America have seen their culture, their traditions at odds with the traditions and cultures of many settlers and emigrants from all over the world. Lacking the grounding that a strong culture provides can and often has left individuals twisting in the wind.

To look at the importance of culture in society from a different perspective, I have been told that in political science terminology there is even a term "Canadianization." No. I'm afraid, Mr. Speaker, that it doesn't have much to do with what makes something or someone more Canadian. *Au contraire*. It refers to the systematic weakening of a country's culture and traditions to the point where it can be said that a country is lacking a national or cultural identity of its own.

8:50

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that Motion 503 is a step away from the Canadianization of Alberta's culture and heritage. Motion 503 is a means by which to strengthen Alberta's culture, to make it more accessible. Indeed, Motion 503 is all about creating access to the past for as many Albertans as possible. By creating access, we

will also stimulate interest, and by stimulating interest, we will help build the community, our community. For some, admission fees are proving prohibitive barriers, thereby effectively preventing them from partaking of Alberta's unique and rich history. However, by offering free admission to Albertans once a month, the province will enhance people's ability to actively participate in the larger community. By enabling a large number of Albertans to learn more about Alberta's past, I firmly believe that Motion 503 would also help create a greater sense of community among our province's residents.

Mr. Speaker, a commonly voiced concern these days is how our society is disintegrating and becoming more fragmented. Some choose to talk about it in terms of family values, others talk about the loss of moral fibre, and yet others talk about how economics have transcended the family in terms of stature and importance. It may not be obvious immediately, but Motion 503 stands to counteract some of the ill effects of societal fragmentation. It offers a forum for a family to spend more time together while at the same time becoming active participants in our shared history as Albertans.

During the 2000-2001 fiscal year, which ended on March 31, 2001, the most recent year for which official figures are available, there were almost 1.1 million visitors to Alberta's historical sites and museums. During the period between April 1, 2001, and December 31, 2001, there were over 900,000 visitors, according to unofficial statistics. The Alberta government has an interest in preserving the province's history. In doing so, popular participation is invaluable. While the attendance rates are quite high for both museums in our province, it can be inferred that a large number of these visitors are from out of the province or from out of the country. I would like to see more Albertans and more non-Albertans alike go to our museums and heritage sites so that we can all see and learn more about Alberta's past.

Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member proposes in Motion 503 is a modest 12 days a year during which the provincial museums and heritage sites would not charge admission. I realize that it may cause some worry that such a free day will draw people away from the days when they would have to pay for admission. I don't wish to belittle such worries or concerns, but it is equally important to look at the bright side. All those people who previously might not have been able to visit the museums and the heritage sites will be able to do so. They will tell their friends, and friends will tell their friends, and so on. Word of mouth is really a cheap form of advertising, and there's bound to be a spillover effect. Quite frankly, not everyone will be able to go on the free day. Regardless of when people choose to go, they will perhaps pick up a souvenir of some kind or maybe they will visit the cafeteria for something to eat. Services like those will generate extra revenue and offset the losses, if any, the museums and heritage sites would incur as a result of having a free day each month.

Mr. Speaker, we are a rich province. We have the lowest unemployment rate in all of Canada. We have the strongest economy in all of Canada and the lowest taxes of all the provinces and territories. We have a history that is second to none. It is in our interest to have as many of our fellow Albertans partake in our rich heritage as can.

During her speech the hon. Member from St. Albert said something that really resonates with me. She said that each of Alberta's many museums and historic sites tell a story of their own and that together they all tell the story of Alberta and tell us the story of our forebears, and one day they will tell the story to our children and to our children's children. Mr. Speaker, what if our children or our children's children don't know the story of Alberta? If they don't know it, then who will tell them?

As a member of the Historical Society of Alberta and the Chinook

Country Historical Society, I don't want that to happen, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that all of my colleagues in the Assembly feel the same way, so I urge all of you to join me in supporting Motion 503. Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't my intention to speak to this particular motion at this time, but Calgary-Fort has driven me to do so. This is a great warm and friendly, fuzzy kind of motion. Of course we want everybody to be able to enjoy all of the provincial facilities free of charge, but Calgary-Fort would let us think that this would solve some of the more significant problems we have in our society, and it certainly doesn't do that. I don't see how getting a free day will help fractured families heal themselves. What they need are good public transportation systems, a livable minimum wage, proper day care, life-skills training in how to get their families up in the morning, properly feed them, and shop for groceries. You have to address those kinds of basic issues first before we start to deal with some of the issues around fractured families. This is, from his perspective, a feel-good, bandage kind of solution, Mr. Speaker, that truly doesn't address the real issues, and like my colleague . . . [interjection] That's right. The government doesn't have to do anything. They can say that they've done something without actually having done anything, and that's mostly the route that they like to go.

My colleague from Edmonton-Centre earlier said that if being free meant something, then these galleries would be full, and we know, Mr. Speaker, from being here day after day, year after year that few people come to watch what must be the very lively entertainment provided by provincial politicians.

MS BLAKEMAN: You can see dinosaurs right here.

MS CARLSON: Yes, that's true. You can see dinosaurs right here for free. Some of them are gone now. I've seen many of them in my lifetime, though, Mr. Speaker; I have to tell you that.

While this is a good motion and has some merit for sure, Mr. Speaker, there are some real issues that need to be addressed in this province. I would have to point out that I do believe that this legislative time could be better spent dealing with the substantive issues that are there for people in this province at this time.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I regret to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business on this day has now concluded.

9:00

head: **Government Motions**

Easter Recess

20. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, March 21, 2002, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 8, 2002, at 1:30 p.m.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIR: I'd like to now call the committee to order.

Bill 17

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2002

THE CHAIR: Before I call on any hon. members, I'd like to explain for the benefit of those who've been in the gallery for a little while that this is the informal part of the Assembly, so the rules are changed. You can see that members can move around wherever they wish, although we try and maintain, occasionally with some notable exceptions . . . [interjections] Anyway, as I was explaining to those who are supposed to know better and those who are now about to learn, we only have one member standing and speaking at a time and try to stick to that rule.

Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be made with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MS CARLSON: Don't ask for the question this early, because we could go on for quite a long time on this particular bill if we're pushed on it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Every time you ask, it's another 15 minutes.

MS CARLSON: That's right.

Bill 17, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2002, is an interim supply request. It's my first opportunity to speak to this particular legislation, Mr. Chairman. What we're looking at this year is a total amount being requested by the government to finish out their spending requirements for the year of \$4.090 billion. This is the second year in a row that this government has used this mechanism as a budgetary tool, and that's an issue for us in terms of the budgeting process. Last year they asked for, I believe at this point in time, over \$7 billion. Last year that was about 36 percent of their total budget.

The problem, Mr. Chairman, as I see it, is that the government's reliance on this kind of a mechanism is additional proof that the government cannot budget properly. Instead, it spends and then slashes and then spends some more. We are always being portrayed as tax-and-spend Liberals, but in fact we haven't been in government in this province since about 1917, and this government, who's been in government for now over 30 years, has a policy of cut and spend, which can be, I believe, worse than tax and spend, because at least tax and spend gives you some sort of a framework to work within. Spending like mad fools and then cutting like mad fools doesn't do anybody any good and certainly doesn't provide a stable fiscal framework, which is what we would hope that this government would look for.

While it is not our intention to hold up this legislation, because the government does need moneys to operate, we do have serious concerns regarding the need to resort to this type of budgeting mechanism again this year.

MS BLAKEMAN: They could have called us into session in mid-February, and we'd be done.

MS CARLSON: Absolutely. There's no doubt that with a proper planning process, Mr. Chairman, we would see a legislative recall much earlier in the year. In January, February we could easily come back. Everybody else after the Christmas holidays goes back to work the first or second week of January. Not us. This government has a habit of dithering when it comes to budget-making decisions,

and we've seen that particularly this year, when we're facing some budget cutbacks and a loss of their windfall revenue.

We saw last year the big payoffs coming because we were on the eve of an election, and the government wanted to look good and did so, but what's the excuse this year? Why another \$4 billion this year? What was wrong with the process, which I know they start in the early fall in terms of trying to build the framework for the following year and can't get it happening? Even this year we started the legislative session in the third week of February. Here it is coming into the third week of March before we actually see a budget coming forward. We have a two-week spring break now, and then there are at least an additional two weeks of budget debate, where we debate departments in the afternoons and in the evenings, so it's at least another six weeks before we get budget approval. If they would start the legislative session earlier in the year and properly manage their budgets so that they're ready to present at that particular point in time, then we wouldn't have to come back for interim supply.

Once again, when we see this bill come forward, what we have is really a distinct lack of explanation of how the new spending will contribute to meeting defined outcomes and performance criteria in the government business plans. We note that this is the particular concern the Auditor General has year after year, that yes, we've got outcomes and performance criteria built into the budget, but the government never meets those outcomes, or the performance criteria doesn't actually measure what it is that the department is doing. So it's like looking at the budget documents and then wondering which country they actually apply to, because it certainly isn't this province. There's a real disconnect between what they build into the budget documents and the actual performance of their duties. At some point you would expect that the government would actually hit some of the benchmarks, but it doesn't happen in most departments most of the time. So, of course, that's an issue for us when we debate this kind of stuff. We would hope that the government would get better at this. They've been doing it for as long as I've been in here now – it was '93 when they first brought it in – and are still missing the mark, Mr. Chairman. So we hope that perhaps we'll see some better performance this year.

We also will be having a new Auditor General come into place. I know that the Acting Auditor General follows the same mind-set that the former Auditor General did, and that's good. I thought that he did his work, for the most part, with a great deal of diligence and helped to push and sometimes drag this government to where it needs to go.

MS BLAKEMAN: Kicking and screaming.

MS CARLSON: Kicking and screaming often. No doubt about it.

Hopefully the person that they will be finding as the new Auditor General will have the same kind of mind-set and won't be intimidated or bullied by anyone within government departments and will take a look at defining the same kind of criteria and perhaps even being a little tougher. That would be excellent.

What we could have seen in the business plans and the explanation of how this spending could have been done was a plan in terms of how the government would sustain public health care. What we see instead is leaked information stating that hospital beds will be closed, especially in rural Alberta, sometime in the future, dates yet to be announced. The health minister dodged that question very effectively today in question period, but, Mr. Chairman, he won't be able to dodge it indefinitely, and at some point he's going to have to come clean and tell us exactly what's happening there.

9:10

What they could have done was told us how they were going to use this money to solve the problems in education. This is one that

this government is not going to be able to sweep under the rug, Mr. Chairman. I have never seen people so unhappy, and for people three years or four years before the next election to be coming forward at this point in time with lobbying tactics and election-readiness planning is quite a surprise. Also, I have to say, quite frankly, that it is quite a surprise they come from the teaching profession, because it isn't what we've seen. They haven't been all that tactical in the past in terms of election awareness and election readiness, but I think we're going to see some surprises there. It'll be interesting to see how they move forward with their planning and whether they can sustain the energy that they have right now. My money is on the teachers. I believe they have very long memories. I believe they are very good organizers. I believe that if I was on the government side of the House, I would be a little frightened of what could happen down the road.

What we could have seen in here, rather than just moneys being spent, was an actual plan of what would be spent on maintaining our infrastructure programs. We have talked repeatedly about setting up an infrastructure fund that would provide sustainable, consistent funding from year to year. The volatile kind of spending and funding patterns this government gets into because of the volatility of the kind of revenues we take in in this province cause havoc in private industry, and that kind of a structure ends up costing governments and everyone doing business with governments many more dollars than it should have to.

If we had stable, responsible spending, people and companies and municipalities could organize their own spending patterns and building patterns and growth patterns in sustainable kinds of frameworks that would exist more than 12 months down the road. That becomes very important when you're funding infrastructure because of the high cost and length of time it takes to put infrastructure in place in many cases. Instead of pushing down the boom or bust cycle that this government seems to be dependent upon and makes other groups dependent upon as well, we could have some stability. I would suspect to see some sustained growth resulting from that. I'm surprised, actually, that the Minister of Economic Development doesn't support that kind of a plan, because I know that he is certainly a huge cheerleader for Alberta and wants to see business grow in leaps and bounds. How can that best happen? By providing a framework for stable funding. So if he wants to see Alberta's economic growth be larger than what it has been and far outstrip what we've seen in the past year, then I would think that he would get on this particular bandwagon, too, because at the end of the day it will certainly make him look good.

MR. NORRIS: Well, we all need more of that.

MS CARLSON: Well, that's right. We do.

MR. NORRIS: That's a struggle at the best of times.

MS CARLSON: There you go.

So I think that this is a solution that that particular minister should be promoting and supporting at the cabinet table, and we'll see where it goes over the next couple of years.

There are some other areas that we should have seen the details on in this particular supply request in terms of where this \$4 billion is going. Certainly one of them that has been top of mind for many of us for the last couple of weeks is the tragedies that we've seen with our young people under provincial care. What we see is a change in mind-set, even in the past couple of years, to what we had in the last five years, Mr. Chairman, with regard to how this government measures performance. In the past we saw it measured by whether

or not they could balance the budget, but what we're seeing now is various departments being measured by how many people they take into the system on one end and how fast they can take those people and punt them out the other side. There's nothing wrong with the concept as long as the people going through the system get the kind of service, the kind of input, the kind of support that they require. What we're seeing is that government departments are kicking these people out and loose too quickly, that they're just running them through the system as if they were on a treadmill without ensuring along the way that needs have been met.

What does that mean, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about Children's Services? It means that when we pay managers and staff an incentive payment to kick kids out of the system, we are not necessarily meeting those people's needs. We're meeting the needs of the managers and the staff people who are receiving bonuses, because they're getting more money, but that shouldn't be the criterion those decisions are made on. It isn't how fast they get off the system; it's how effectively they are able to survive once out of the system. So if we haven't done the proper inputs, where we've given those people the skills to develop their lives outside of being supported by the system, then we've failed in the delivery of services to those people. So if you're going to pay people bonuses – and I am not an advocate of paying bonuses to people who work within government systems; I think that is contrary to what government services should be providing – clearly we need to change the framework under which the bonuses are funded. It needs to be not how fast they get through the system or how many you kick out of the system at the end of the month but how successfully those people re-enter a world that does not include the system, Mr. Chairman.

I think that is something that we definitely need to take a look at. Whatever they've done in Children's Services is showing to be becoming not only a total, dismal failure but tragedies in the making as we see children dying, freezing to death while in care. The other kinds of tragedies that are starting to slip through the system and the stress that some of the people working within the system are under in trying to adequately support these people is a sad statement on how this government is delivering services. I think that's something that needs to be looked at.

I sincerely hope that in this budget we're going to see tomorrow, we see those particular issues addressed in a way that can address some of the problems that we've seen within the system. If not, this government can be guaranteed that we will be on those issues and we will not let go of them until we see a change in mind-set. Something is definitely wrong in the Department of Children's Services, and this government holds the responsibility for the wrongness and also for solving some of those issues. I think that those are some of the places we needed to have had some explanation for when we took a look at the \$4.9 billion being requested and some of the places where we didn't see an explanation. So that's a problem.

What doesn't go away in interim supply are some of the same issues that are outstanding, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about budget. Particularly with this government, the problem that doesn't go away is the lack of budget management. We see this illustrated in a number of ways. One of those is by the amount of unbudgeted spending brought in through the supplementary supply estimates over the past couple of years. We had one of those just about a week ago, Mr. Chairman. The problem is that if the Minister of Finance doesn't have reasonable controls over the unbudgeted spending, then how can we really trust this government when they say that there is no more money? We saw money for nurses and doctors and politicians, but we don't see any money for teachers. What changed, Mr. Chairman, between yesterday and today?

9:20

Well, this government will tell us that it's the oil and gas revenues. I would state to them that it's their inability to manage. In fact, they will still have collected over \$21 billion in revenue for the course of the year. Twenty-one billion dollars in revenue to service just over 3 million people: that's a lot of cash. Clearly, there is enough money to go around. Clearly, if it's managed properly, there is more than enough money to go around.

Many of our government members are happy to state that they are fiscal conservatives. That's good, Mr. Chairman. I would say that I also am a fiscal conservative, because I expect to get a dollar's worth out of a dollar or a dollar's worth out of a dollarette, which is worth less than a dollar, and there's no reason why we can't get that kind of value for our money. Have we been getting it under this government's stewardship? I would put it to you and to the rest of the members of this Assembly that we have not. They have not gotten good value for the money.

What could they have in these budget processes that would help that? The same things we would put in place in private industry or not-for-profits, Mr. Chairman, things like efficiency audits. What is wrong with going through a department to decide how efficient it is? It isn't enough to say: my budget was X last year, inflation has increased by this amount, we've got a few new projects that we want to do, so what I need is this much more money. That's not the way to do it. The way to do it is to go through the department and say: are we being efficient in delivering the services that we're expected to deliver? What are those services? Clearly define them, and then follow the path of delivery.

What we had was a government who back in '93 just cut the money. It was like squeezing water out of a sponge at that time; they cut and shrank services down. But they didn't actually look for efficiencies. So what happened when a little money or a little water was poured back onto that sponge? It just alarmingly grew and became big and cumbersome again.

MS BLAKEMAN: Like a puffer fish.

MS CARLSON: Yes, like a puffer fish. Just like a puffer fish.

There were no efficiencies brought into that particular system. There are no economies of scale or efficiencies that we saw, just a huge expansion. So now people are screaming blue murder because budgets are being cut by 1 percent or whatever, but they still haven't got any efficiencies in place, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIR: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 17.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 14
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2002

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 14 and to move second reading of Bill 14, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2002.

Bill 14 proposes a number of amendments to the current legislation, the Gaming and Liquor Act, all of which add up to enhancing the integrity of gaming and liquor activities in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, integrity is paramount in my ministry. In fact, it's one of the key components of Alberta Gaming's mission, which is "to ensure integrity, transparency, disclosure, public consultation and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries." The theme of integrity ties in with our vision:

Supports the responsible use and enjoyment of gaming and liquor products, uses revenues derived from these activities for the benefit of all Albertans, and encourages service and competition in [Alberta's] liquor and gaming industries.

Mr. Speaker, the vision and mission of my ministry need to be at the core of everything that we do when we consider that gaming and liquor activities are big business here in Alberta. The third-quarter forecast reported government revenues of \$495 million from liquor sales in this fiscal year. It also reported that more than \$1.1 billion will be received by the government from gaming activities in the province and that all of these dollars will be used for charitable, nonprofit, public, and community-based initiatives through the Alberta lottery fund.

We've had liquor regulation in force in this province since the early 1920s. However, the introduction of the Gaming and Liquor Act represented the first provincial legislation to govern gaming in Alberta. Because of the fiscal impact of the two industries it's vital that the provisions of the act remain relevant and necessary to preserve and enhance the integrity of gaming and liquor activities. Albertans expect nothing less of us, and our commitment to this remains crystal clear.

Mr. Speaker, over the past five years the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission and Alberta's gaming and liquor licensees and stakeholders have operated within the legislative framework provided by the Gaming and Liquor Act and gaming and liquor regulations. For the purposes of the regulatory reform initiative the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission was required to undertake a complete review of the regulations. We also felt that it was an opportune time to review the act. By looking at the two together, we could ensure that the act and regulations continued to function together as the roadmap for gaming and liquor activities conducted within the province.

We also wanted to be sure that we heard from Albertans affected by our legislation, so last fall we conducted extensive consultations with all of our key stakeholders, ranging from police agencies to businesses in the gaming and liquor industries, regarding our proposed changes. We held an additional round of consultations early this past January. Where appropriate we incorporated the

feedback we received in the final legislative changes I introduced on March 6 as Bill 14. As a result of our consultations, we believe that the proposed amendments to the act consider both current industry practices as well as the changes that have occurred in the gaming and liquor industry since 1996. They do this while maintaining and strengthening integrity. I know I've said this before, but I just want to emphasize again how important this is not only to my ministry but to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, under the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act we proposed a number of changes that not only clarify terms, roles, and responsibilities for licensees and the AGLC but also will help the AGLC to operate more efficiently and effectively. Most of the changes are relatively minor, almost housekeeping, if you will, but there are several important ones that I'd like to specifically highlight to the members of the Assembly.

First of all, the board of the AGLC currently has no express authority to ensure that charitable groups use the proceeds earned from conducting a licensed charitable event for the purpose that they've identified. The proposed amendment specifies that the board would be given the authority to direct groups to use their gaming proceeds in an appropriate manner if the board has reason to believe that the group has not or will not use the proceeds in accordance with their licence terms, AGLC policy, the act, or the Criminal Code. By making this change, the board will be able to ensure that gaming proceeds are spent only on approved charitable programs. This adheres to Alberta's unique charitable model for gaming, a model whose fundamental purpose is to benefit charitable, nonprofit, public, and community-based initiatives. I think we can all agree that this model should be placed on a high pedestal, and the use of the proceeds amendment forms the base of that pedestal.

9:30

A second change deals with minors found in licensed casino facilities, which is currently only an offence against the licensee. The proposed amendment would also add racing entertainment centres alongside casinos and would make it an offence against the minor as well. This is consistent with the liquor provisions of the act, which make it an offence against both parties if a minor is found in a licensed premise. Mr. Speaker, this change will reinforce our message to minors that they are not allowed to enter casinos or racing entertainment centres, and we believe that by making it an offence under the law, it will be a stronger deterrent for minors. This ties in with our vision of the responsible use and enjoyment of gaming activities in Alberta, and we will continue to be vigilant in our efforts to ensure that minors do not enter these facilities.

The third change I'd like to highlight is a provision to make it an offence for liquor or gaming facility licensees to permit an apparently intoxicated person to participate in a gaming activity. As with the provisions dealing with minors, Mr. Speaker, this goes back to the responsible use of gaming and liquor activities. There's nothing in the current act to prevent someone who has apparently had too much to drink from participating in a licensed gaming activity. It is, however, an offence for a licensee to sell, provide, or permit consumption of liquor by an intoxicated person in a licensed premise. The proposed amendment will ensure that licensees take responsibility for preventing apparently intoxicated people from gambling, while continuing to promote responsible alcohol consumption.

A fourth change to the Gaming and Liquor Act has to do with casino facility licences. Mr. Speaker, as it now stands, if a facility licence is suspended or canceled, there's a risk that the facility may close down. If a facility closes down, a large number of casino employees are put out of work, charities are disadvantaged, and the

government loses revenue. The proposed amendment would add provisions allowing the AGLC upon licence suspension or cancellation to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench to appoint a receiver to manage the facility's operations. This will prevent any unnecessary closure of casinos and will ensure that charitable groups continue to benefit from gaming revenues.

Mr. Speaker, another highlight is a change that was initiated by the liquor industry and is strongly supported by this government. Under the gaming and liquor regulation the board of the AGLC may not issue a retail liquor store licence to an applicant unless the proposed store is separate from any other business of the applicant. The Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2002, will see this important provision move from the regulation to the act. This will ensure that the separate business provision is given a higher degree of permanence and profile, effectively reinforcing the government's commitment to our existing retail liquor store model. This model has proven to be extremely successful, so successful, in fact, that several other provinces are looking to Alberta as an example of how to privatize liquor retailing. With that kind of spotlight shining on us, we felt it was important to make our commitment abundantly clear.

Mr. Speaker, the last change I'd like to highlight is the reason this bill was introduced as a money bill on March 6. The AGLC is one of the very few commercial organizations operated within this government. The operating expenses of the AGLC are subject to an annual voted appropriation. This requirement can restrict the AGLC's responsiveness to changing market conditions and, therefore, could limit our flexibility to capitalize on unforeseen revenue-generating opportunities that may arise during a fiscal year. To allow us the ability to take advantage of these opportunities while maintaining our accountability to this Assembly and through it to Albertans, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act would allow us to use the revenue generated by the commission to pay its operating costs. All moneys paid out in this fashion will continue to be managed and accounted for in accordance with the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

As mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, gaming and liquor are big business here in Alberta. The revenues brought in by gaming activities are used to the benefit of all Albertans through support of charitable and public initiatives. Liquor revenues aren't as large as those from gaming, but our model of privatization has proven to be one of benefit to Albertans as well through increased jobs, product selection, and some of the best prices in the country. Going hand in hand with these revenues is my favourite word: integrity.

The gaming and liquor industries have undergone a fair amount of change over the last five years, and the proposed amendments are necessary to preserve and enhance the integrity of these two activities in Alberta. The Gaming ministry's mission and vision are clear, and Bill 14 will magnify that clarity with its provisions. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to join me in support of Bill 14 and look forward to hearing their comments during the debate.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 14.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16

Racing Corporation Amendment Act, 2002

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today

to move second reading of Bill 16, the Racing Corporation Amendment Act, 2002.

Bill 16 proposes a number of amendments to the current legislation, the Racing Corporation Act, and it is intended to give Alberta's horse racing industry an opportunity to restructure and revitalize itself.

Mr. Speaker, horse racing has a long and colourful history in Alberta, and the amendments to the Racing Corporation Act will serve to enhance the industry's ability to manage and promote itself effectively. The foundation of Bill 16 can be traced back to recommendations made by the industry in their horse racing industry review report. The bill now before this Assembly is a direct result of the industry collectively asking for legislative changes and government's willingness to support those changes for the betterment of the overall industry. With such a broad and diverse group of stakeholders affected by this legislation, I think it's important to note that all segments of the horse racing industry were part of the consultation process and that they collectively support the contents of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, in order to give the horse racing industry the framework it needs to succeed, Bill 16 acts on the industry's recommendations to change the framework that governs the industry while ensuring a smooth transition period going forward. Other changes in the legislation were initiated by government also in response to issues raised in the horse racing industry review report. These changes are focused primarily on increasing industry accountability and introducing performance measures to ensure positive future growth.

What it comes down to, Mr. Speaker, is that a strong horse racing industry has a rippling effect through the province, particularly within the agricultural community. Bill 16 is intended to provide industry the means to ensure that new and productive chapters will be written into the future history of horse racing in Alberta.

I would now like to highlight for the hon. members of this Assembly a few of the most important changes. Mr. Speaker, one of the main changes contained in Bill 16 is the renaming of the Alberta Racing Corporation. A change is often a refreshing exercise, one that signals a renewed sense of purpose and vision. To mark a new era of prosperity, the industry has requested that the Alberta Racing Corporation be renamed Horse Racing Alberta. This change goes deeper than simply renaming the corporation. Horse Racing Alberta will be an important new symbol that will represent a newly expanded, more effective governing body.

As part of the new governance structure, the board of Horse Racing Alberta would be increased in size from seven members to a maximum of 12. This increase would allow for input from additional members, from key stakeholder groups not currently represented on the Alberta Racing Corporation board. This would help create one industrywide organization that could act as one voice for the industry.

9:40

A final highlight from Bill 16 deals with reporting and accountability. Currently the Alberta Racing Corporation is required to submit an annual report to the minister, who must table a copy in this Assembly. The minister can also request other information. The changes proposed in Bill 16 would expand the reporting requirements to include ministerial approval of multiyear business plans and associated performance measures. These accountability tools coupled with annual reporting will serve as the new standard of measuring the vitality of the industry. Mr. Speaker, these expanded reporting requirements are necessary to satisfy the government that funds flowed to the horse racing industry as part of

the racing industry renewal initiative will be used for priority purposes and are measurably helping to achieve the results expected. Introducing these strengthened requirements also establishes planning and reporting standards similar to those required of government grant recipients and increases the organization's accountability for use of the funds provided.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would reiterate that these changes were requested by and developed in consultation with all segments of the horse racing industry. These changes are necessary to help industry promote and grow horse racing in the province, and as I said earlier, a vibrant horse racing industry has a trickle-down effect throughout the entire province. I would encourage my colleagues, all of my colleagues, to support Bill 16, for it is indeed a very fine piece of legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate to adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:42 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]