

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 20, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 02/11/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we continue our work this day, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Thank you for that thunderous applause.

Mr. Speaker, it's an absolute delight for me to rise today. As you know, the constituency of Edmonton-McClung produces some very interesting and wonderful things, not the least of which are the kids from Ormsby elementary school. They're here today with their teachers Mrs. Linda Vanjoff, Mr. Thomas Lock, Ms Tina Yonge, and they're all in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Edmonton-McClung is great.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly six great individuals from my constituency and probably known to quite a number of you. They are also on county council in Thorhild, and I'd like to introduce them. First, we have Henry Zolkewski, the reeve of the county; the deputy reeve, Lyle Kuzik; Nick Lazowski, councillor; Kevin Grumetza, councillor; William Kowal, councillor; and the county manager, Robyn Singleton. They're here for the AAMD and C convention and are here to observe us, so please welcome them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to the members a constituent from High Level, Dianne Hunter. In fact, she's the CAO of the town of High Level. She's here today as part of the AAMD and C conference and a little later this afternoon a meeting with our Solicitor General. She's standing in the members' gallery, and I would like our members to give her the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to the House through you 27 students representing St. Augustine school. They're accompanied by their teachers Miss Elana Siminton and Christine Wong and by parent helper Dina McMahon. We would ask them to please rise and accept the warm and gracious welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of introducing to you and to all members of the House today Ms Shirley Barg. She's vice-president of Athabasca University Students' Union and a member of the Council of Alberta University Students, an organization called CAUS. She along with all the members of the CAUS, close to a hundred thousand students, is trying to convince the government to reduce tuition fees. She's also among those students who are wondering why the government, on the one hand, is letting tuition fees go up while the government is actively engaged in cutting the corporate taxes in this province. I think Ms Barg is there, and I'll ask everyone to welcome her.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: This government's priorities are really mixed up. Over the past three years millions of dollars in capital improvements on schools have been put on hold, and 135 schools are rated by this government as in poor condition. Meanwhile, this government continues to give handsome bonuses to its managers, with some bonuses as high as \$29,000, more than many Albertans earn in a single year. My question to the Premier: how can you justify nearly \$3 million in staff bonuses to employees of Alberta Infrastructure over the past three years while thousands of students are sitting in run-down schools?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that across Canada I believe that our senior public service employees, sad to say, are amongst the lowest paid. What we try to do, within a reasonable degree, is bring them into scope so as not to lose them to other jurisdictions and, indeed, the private sector. I would point out that many of our deputy ministers, certainly many, many of our assistant deputy ministers, earn far less than school superintendents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister to supplement.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that under the new century school program, which was started two years ago, there was some \$1.1 billion – \$1.1 billion – spent on schools.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. Given that \$3 million could have provided 1,700 poor children with hot lunches every school day for three years, but instead it went to feed the bureaucracy, can the Premier tell us what his priority is: hungry children or bonuses for well-paid employees?

MR. KLEIN: Naturally we're concerned about hungry children, and we address the issues of poverty and certainly have programs in place to accommodate those who are truly in need in society, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to do that.

Relative to the salary issue, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal Party that our senior public service employees had their salaries frozen for five years in a row, then took a 5 percent rollback. Right now they're in a catch-up phase, but, as I said previously, they are nowhere near what other senior public service employees get paid across this country, certainly absolutely nowhere near what they get paid in the private sector.

DR. NICOL: Given that \$3 million in bonuses were handed over to well-paid employees in just one government department over the

past three years, including one bonus of \$29,000, can the Premier explain why he can't toss a few crumbs to low-income Albertans who haven't seen a raise in 10 years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, low-income Albertans are receiving a lot more than a few crumbs. I point to AISH in particular, one of the programs that is unique in Canada. It's the policy of this government, as I stated yesterday, to provide a hand up rather than a handout and to accommodate those who truly need our help and to help those who are on welfare and are able to work to get off the welfare rolls and to find employment and to earn a living in a dignified manner.

DR. NICOL: Over the past five years this government has gotten fatter and fatter. It's abandoned any pretense of fiscal responsibility and restraint. The government's own numbers show that it is spending \$358 million more on salaries, wages, and benefits than it did five years ago, coincidentally the same amount needed by the Calgary board of education for deferred maintenance projects. Mr. Speaker, not only does this government have its priorities all mixed up, I'm afraid it's been seriously infected with a bad case of chronic wasting disease. My first question to the Premier: how can you justify spending nearly one-third more on government salaries and wages while Albertans are paying more user fees and receiving fewer services? Was the \$184 million increase in health premiums this year alone to pay for this bloated payroll?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic and quite contradictory that the hon. member would be asking this particular question since it's the Liberal Party that consistently and constantly demands of this government to spend more for teachers, more for nurses, more for doctors, more for social workers, more, more, more, and when we provide reasonable salary increases, they complain. I don't know really where they're coming from. Do they want more for teachers, doctors, nurses, nurses aides, and other public service employees? They're constantly crying for more and more money. When we pay them more money, then they complain. I can't figure it.

1:40

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, it has to do with good management. We would do it better.

How can the Premier justify a 26 percent increase in Executive Council salaries over the past three years and a 117 percent increase in deputy minister salaries, benefits, allowances since 1997 when schools are crumbling and SFI and AISH recipients have not received any increases?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as you know, relative to SFI and AISH that matter is under review, the result of the low-income review, and that situation will be addressed. We've heard from representatives of various groups representing people who are deemed to be in poverty, and we'll deal with that particular situation.

Relative to Executive Council salaries and the salaries of other public service employees, Mr. Speaker, what we try to do is make sure that, as best we possibly can, our salaries are in line with other jurisdictions. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to meet the salary allotments that are given in many other jurisdictions, but we try our hardest to do that. In other words, we try to treat people fairly, and that's what it's all about.

DR. NICOL: I ask you, Mr. Premier: when are you going to keep your promise to reduce the size of government and return to a smaller cabinet, reduce it from the 24 that you have?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, 24 is not bad on a percentage basis considering the huge majority we have and the very measly minority they have.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Revenue announced that the heritage fund has suffered losses of \$1.3 billion in the first six months of this year. Another blow in a long line of attempts by this government to deplete the heritage fund is the most recent survey, with one trick question and three others that show that all this government wants is to spend, spend, spend the fund. My questions are to the Minister of Revenue. Why doesn't the survey on the future of the heritage fund provide Albertans with a meaningful opportunity to indicate that they want this fund saved for the future?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think we should ever apologize for consulting with Albertans. You know, there are four questions in that survey, and I'm glad that he's reminded. It's an opportunity to invite all Albertans to complete that by this Friday, which is the close date, November 22. Of the four questions, two come from the original mandate of the fund: that of a long-term endowment, which a portion of it has always been dedicated to and a portion quite likely will forever be dedicated to.

The other question: what to do with capital? Over \$3.5 billion has been invested in various projects like the Walter C. Mackenzie centre, the Tom Baker cancer centre, Kananaskis park, a variety of projects that benefit now and future Albertans.

The other two questions are a direct result of the Future Summit recommendations: that of sustainability – should that form part of it? – and should the debt be paid down? We're following up as a promise to Albertans through a public consultation to put their ideas forward so that Albertans can have the choice.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does this minister spend \$365,000 on a manipulative and meaningless survey instead of holding a referendum and getting meaningful direction from Albertans?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a fund that has such great value to Albertans, it is important that we do take time to not just survey but that we also give time to educate and inform and allow them to participate in the democratic process. This is very much part of it, and we're pleased to have it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the larger this government becomes, the more the heritage fund shrinks, how many ministries will it take to spend the heritage fund?

MR. MELCHIN: You know, the heritage fund, I must say at the outset, is here to stay. It's here to benefit not just current generations

but future generations of Albertans, and that's what the survey is about.

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

Rural Health Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tory MLAs are in open revolt against this government's plans to close rural hospitals. The Lakeland health region, chaired by a former Tory cabinet minister, is refusing to do the government's dirty work by closing or downgrading rural hospitals in northeastern Alberta. Three cheers for him. Rural Albertans are furious with this government, and rightly so, especially when they know that this government is generous with tax cuts to big corporations that don't need a penny of their social welfare. My question now to the minister of health: why is the minister content to have as his legacy the closure or downgrading of public hospitals in rural communities?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think that the chairman of the regional health authority out in Lakeland would be most astonished to have the support of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Let me say that we have a commitment to maintaining a level of services in rural Alberta that is sustainable. That sustainability must be not only for people that live in Calgary and Edmonton, but it must also exist for people that live in Hairy Hill, Two Hills, Pincher Creek, Red Earth Creek. Whether it's in Fort McMurray or Fort Macleod, Mr. Speaker, we have a commitment to maintaining our facilities in rural Alberta where they are required. There are and have been examples where facilities for any one of a number of reasons may have been converted to long-term care centres.

We, of course, have different ways of delivering health care throughout the province. We have teleradiology. We have telehealth. We have telepsychiatry. We have many ways of making sure that our administrative systems are as effective and as efficient as possible. But to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, our goal is to try and decentralize the delivery of services in health care. We are making better use of facilities that exist outside of Calgary and Edmonton, and there are outstanding facilities throughout rural Alberta, but the crux of the matter is that we are maintaining and in some cases able to improve delivery of health care in rural Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the minister got Mr. Isley's message clear and loud.

How can the government insist that rural RHAs can operate on funding increases of 2 percent this year when their costs have increased closer to 6 percent?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there have been increases to regional health authorities. While it is true that some regional health authorities get a 2 percent increase, other regional health authorities have had up to a 7.8 percent increase, and the reason is that we fund on the basis of population. The more population you have, the greater your growth in population, the more funding attracts it. Also, our population funding formula recognizes that there are increases as a result of dealing with an older population, of dealing with a lower income population, of dealing with the aboriginal population, and our funding reflects that.

Now, it is correct, Mr. Speaker, that there are some regional health authorities that because their populations have either been stagnant

or in some cases have been decreasing, in those cases the funding increase that they get is less than in areas where the regional health authorities have experienced growth or an aging population. So one of the solutions that has been proposed and will be decided upon through the process of going through our standing policy committee, our caucus, and our cabinet is to determine how we will deal with these issues with smaller regional health authorities that may not be sustainable two, three, four, five years out.

1:50

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the minister is going to have a hard time selling his solution to rural Albertans.

My last question to him: does the minister agree with the Premier when the Premier insulted rural Albertans by describing their hospitals and health facilities as nothing more than local employment centres?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Point of order.

MR. MAR: Two things, Mr. Speaker. First of all, what the hon. member said is patently untrue. Secondly, in answering his question about who has the interests of rural Albertans best in mind: the caucus that is represented in the government of Alberta. I can't name one NDP member from rural Alberta.

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

Automobile Insurance

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past months there has been a flurry of media coverage on automobile insurance in Alberta. These reports indicate that auto insurance premiums are on the rise and will continue to rise if something isn't done about it. Recently it was also announced that a large insurance company and two smaller auto insurers operating in Alberta would stop writing new auto insurance policies in the province. My questions are all to the Minister of Finance. My constituents would like to know what they can do if they are unable to find an insurer to cover their automobile.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that there have been three corporations that have decided to not take on any new customers. That's a corporate decision they have made, but there are another 60-odd insurance companies that do underwrite auto insurance actively in the province of Alberta today. It is the law that you must carry automobile insurance in this province, and if any constituent is having difficulty, they should be aware that there is a facility corporation that is available if it's the last resort for them. So there is availability of auto insurance. If they're having difficulty finding it, they need to just phone the Insurance Bureau, and they will direct them to the appropriate facility.

MR. JOHNSON: In regard to rising premiums, my constituents would like to know what your ministry and the government are doing about this issue.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think all insurance companies are facing the difficult task of rationalizing the costs of claims that have gone through. Some of the payouts have been very, very large for catastrophic accidents, so as a result the premiums have gone up.

We've sort of tracked this a bit, and it looks like it's almost a 10-year cycle that insurance seems to go through. It peaks out and then levels off and goes for roughly eight to 10 years and then ramps up again. I think we're probably in that ramp-up cycle right now, which is making it difficult for all of us who do have to buy insurance because we are all seeing our own policies going up. It's part of the cycle. There's not really anything we can do. It's the cost of business, unfortunately.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, can the minister also take this opportunity to tell this House what effect the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States has had on the insurance industry? Does the insurance industry cover acts of terrorism?

MRS. NELSON: Well, interestingly enough, I guess that if you look at your homeowner plan, there's a new statement on the plan this year that says that it does not cover acts of terrorism, which I don't think we had before, and it is now showing up. Acts of war and acts of terrorism are being identified as being exempt from the coverage of your personal policy. So that has been eliminated. I think that as a result of the devastation that did occur last year, a lot of insurance companies felt that they had to remove that coverage or the assumption of the coverage from their policies, so they're not included on most homeowner plans.

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

Manhattan Resources Ltd.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of concerned citizens residing in the county of Strathcona have recently attended a series of public meetings regarding Manhattan Resources' proposal to drill six sour gas wells. It is my understanding from attending a meeting along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry that companies must go through an intensive process of notification and consultation prior to obtaining a licence, and if this process is disregarded, then the consequences are severe. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why was public consultation in this matter not done in accordance with the standards of the EUB?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, without taking the time of this House to correct the misinformation that the member, as usual, puts forth in his preamble, I will say to you that the matter is in front of the board. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is a quasi-judicial board in this province.

MR. MacDONALD: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how did Manhattan Resources receive approval for a sour gas battery prior to conducting the required public consultation?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, this member is trying to tear down the reputation of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, that is known to be one of the best if not the best regulating boards in the world today. Their information is clear, their information is transparent, and their regulations are available for everyone to follow.

MR. MacDONALD: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that nearby residents were told that there would only be a potential for .01 percent, or 100 parts per million, H₂S and apparently landowners in the vicinity where the wells would be drilled were given documents that illustrate the true potential of H₂S at .66 percent, or 66 hundred parts per million, how can the minister

explain this inconsistency when he is the person that's in charge of the EUB?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the parts per million of intelligence required to ask that question is zero.

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

Green Power Production

MR. LORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently more good news on the alternative energy and energy conservation front in Alberta. Two days ago the Alberta government, through Infrastructure, issued an RFP, a request for proposals, calling for a supplier or suppliers to provide the government with at least 25 percent of its electrical needs from alternative energy sources. Along with this announcement was a reference to an energy retrofit program which is apparently modifying Alberta government buildings. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Could the minister explain what the goals of the Alberta energy retrofit program are, specifically in terms of quantifying any taxpayer impacts on electrical bills as well as greenhouse gas emission impacts?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, back in the mid-90s and in the early '90s this government had been talking about what we could do and what people could do to reduce consumption and therefore reduce the emissions. But, as usual, we in government want to back up our talk with action, so we developed a plan and a program whereby we looked at structures and determined what we needed to do to have a three-year payback period. Then we stepped forward after that program and looked at a five-year payback period.

2:00

We've found that by doing a lot of retrofitting in our buildings, whether that be putting in the more efficient furnaces, heat exchangers, changing to different types of lights, insulating buildings, putting in efficient windows, all of those kinds of things, that would reduce our need for and consumption of fossil fuels, and also we moved, then, into the vehicle area and looked at how we could reduce our consumption of fuels and, of course, the use of automobiles. It was quite interesting, because currently, today, we have completed the five years. As a matter of fact, in this very building we were working on this retrofit this summer, but we have now pretty well completed the five-year cycle. We have now reduced our emissions to 22 percent below the 1990 levels, and by the year 2005 we'll be down to 26 percent below, and we'll see a savings of about \$5 million annually on our utility bills simply through this retrofit program. So if you take that over a 20-year period, you suddenly see that there's about a hundred million dollar value in this program that simply reduced consumption.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Infrastructure. Now, since green power is not subject to depleting reserves or fluctuating world prices of oil and gas, does the minister anticipate that having the government acquire a green energy supplier might in fact help stabilize government budgets going forward, or does green energy supply come with large risks attached as well?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, there are, of course, a number of projects and ways that green power can be produced, ranging from biomass cogeneration, some hydro and, of course, wind energy. The fact is that when the hon. member talks about stabilization of budget, we are in the RFP asking for a longer term contract, so that would help stabilize the budget.

However, I must point out that there are some other benefits that we will be very interested in, and those relate to: how can you help the environment with the purchase of green power? So we'll be looking for what the purchase of this green power does to reduce emissions that are pollutants, not just the CO₂ and things like methane but other things that could be considered pollutants; for example, a particulate or SO₂ or nitrogen oxide, those kinds of things that could be health hazards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Energy. I'm wondering whether the Minister of Energy could confirm whether or not electricity deregulation in Alberta, which has been criticized in some quarters, has had any effect on the development and business viability of green power production in our province, especially as compared to other provinces which have not deregulated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answers to those questions are yes, yes, and yes. The benefit of deregulation allows many optional forms of power to come onstream, and we've seen that with coal-fired natural gas generators. We've seen that with biomass projects. We've seen that with windmills. In fact, with the recent announcement of Fort Macleod and the McBride area — once that's finished, we will be the number one wind province in Canada. We'll have surpassed Quebec. We will have done all this, of course, without any taxpayer investment put towards this type of product. The market is making the decision about the benefits of wind power to local industry in southern Alberta and, of course, the benefits to the electricity grid in the province.

HIV/AIDS Risk in Prison System

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, a recent study by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network has Alberta ranked second to last in a harm reduction rating for preventing the spread of HIV and hep C in our prisons. Prisoners do not have access to the most basic HIV prevention methods that are available outside prison. In Alberta people are not just receiving a jail sentence but potentially a death sentence. My questions are to the Solicitor General. Why has the department chosen not to protect inmates from HIV and hep C?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is referring to a report that has just crossed my desk. I can tell you that Alberta is very conscientious about the HIV and AIDS in our prisons. We are protecting our correction officers; we are protecting our prisoners, but I can tell you that in this province the one thing we are not going to be doing in our young offender centres is handing out condoms to our young offenders.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Has the department done a cost-benefit analysis which leads them to believe that it's cheaper to pay for years of hospitalization and drug therapy than to buy a bottle of bleach and some needles?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is very conscientious about what's going on in our prisons. I can tell you the one thing that this government will be doing. We will not be handing out needles and bleach in our prisons. I have to be concerned about my correction officers and the damages that can be done to them by bad needles. I don't believe that we should be promoting drug abuse in our prisons. I will tell you what we will do though. We will promote drug and alcohol education, and we will also provide them a methadone program if the medical officer on duty deems it fit.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Has the minister considered the government's liability when prisoners under their care get HIV or hep C in prison and are then released into the general public? You are not protecting the spread of this.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, it's a known fact, believe it or not, that sex does occur in our prisons whether we agree with it or not, but I can tell you that we in Alberta are not going to be promoting sex in our jails.

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

Seniors' Benefits

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The average total income for an Alberta senior in constant dollars for the year 1994 was \$24,398. In the year 2000 that average dropped to \$23,146 using the same constant dollars. We have many seniors on fixed incomes who have lost health benefits over the years. Their food, their shelter, their utilities, their property taxes have all gone up considerably. They are suffering financially. To the Minister of Seniors: what is the Minister of Seniors doing to help those seniors meet at least their basic needs?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate of the Ministry of Seniors is to ensure that seniors in this province are well looked after. We focused our resources on the seniors most in need. As a result of that, we have two financial support programs, one being the Alberta seniors' benefits program, which supplements income. We currently have a large number of people on that. The other is a special-needs assistance program which provides a lump sum payment of a maximum of \$5,000 for seniors who run into extraordinary financial circumstances. These people who qualify for special needs have to already be on the seniors' benefit, because they are at the bottom end of it. In addition, the special needs this year has expanded its coverage to the people on the seniors' benefits program with respect to some dental and optical needs because the extended health program had been terminated in Health this past March.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for his answer. Seniors are aware of these benefits and these programs.

Since seniors have expressed concerns about the future of these and other financial benefits available to them, what is your ministry doing to compensate them for the loss of their buying power and to ensure that their current benefits are maintained and benefits for future seniors will be there when they need them?

2:10

MR. WOLOSHTYN: That question is one that the ministry has been reviewing and reviewing and reviewing. What we would like to do would be to introduce some sort of a cost-of-living increase, but due to current financial circumstances within government as a whole, we can't cover the current budget, if you will, let alone increase it, but that would be one of our hopes. The other is we're conducting an internal review of the threshold to see if it is appropriate, but I would like to say, though, that about half the seniors in this province do not pay health care premiums. They only pay a portion or are totally excluded from them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are huge concerns among seniors about the future of the Blue Cross prescription coverage for seniors, could the minister advise the House and the Alberta seniors if there are any changes on the horizon for the Alberta Blue Cross coverage?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Seniors I do not support further reductions in any seniors' programs. I have also been a recipient of correspondence with this concern, which refers specifically to the Blue Cross program. At this point in time I have not been made aware of any effort to reduce that.

The ministry responsible is Health and Wellness, and if the minister so chooses, he may supplement my answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Funding for Postsecondary Education

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tuition in Alberta has increased 208 percent. While some countries are committed to fully accessible postsecondary education by not charging students any tuition, we now have proposals on the table for even more expensive differential fees. My first question is to the Minister of Learning. What is the government doing to combat the sticker price shock that scares students from low-income families away from postsecondary schools?

DR. OBERG: Well, thank you very much for that question. I will address one of the points that was given in the preamble, and that was the whole idea about the countries who do not charge any tuition. Mr. Speaker, in countries such as Australia they attempted to have a no-tuition policy, and very quickly what they found is that the demographics of the population attending university did not change in the least, so what they have subsequently done is gone back to charging tuition.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that he brought up was the whole idea of what we are doing about the sticker shock, and I will say that that is an excellent question, because that is one of the issues that is out

there for the students. They see the price; they don't necessarily see the benefit. I think that for anyone who has ever set up a small business, in order to come out of university after four years with an average of around \$17,000 in debt and be essentially – essentially – guaranteed a job, that's a great investment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the minister of municipalities. Given that student residences are charged property taxes, will the Municipal Government Act be changed to eliminate that tax, thereby helping reduce rents for low-income students?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I want to say that the housing for students today, the work that is being done – we're looking at reviewing the Municipal Government Act, but as you know, the Municipal Government Act of Alberta is one of the leading pieces of government legislation in all of Canada and is certainly recognized that way. What we are contemplating when we open up amendments are all of our options.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks for nothing.

My third question is to the Minister of Learning. How can the government's underfunding of universities do anything but force a two-tier system, one for the rich and one for everyone else?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess there are about two or three different ways that I can answer that. First of all, what I will mention are the student finance programs that we have. Presently in Alberta we have excellent student finance programs, where if a student cannot afford to go to school, they can take out student loans up to the tune of around 10 and a half thousand dollars per year and pay back about \$5,000 per year. So, basically, they've received \$5,500 free for doing that from the government of Alberta, from the people of Alberta.

The second point that I wanted to make on tuition fees: the supposed gospel according to *Maclean's*, which came out last week, showed that the University of Alberta was, actually, number 29 when it came to tuition and fees; the University of Calgary was number 31; and the University of Lethbridge was number 38. Keeping that in mind, Mr. Speaker, what you also saw in the same appraisal of what was happening on the university scene in Canada is that the University of Calgary was number 4 for funding, for operating budget, and number 5 was the University of Alberta. So what you see is high operating budgets and lower than average tuition in Alberta. That's a pretty good deal for students of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government claimed that CO₂ emissions are a natural resource and, therefore, constitutionally, belong to Alberta. Now, if this position is upheld, then the New Democrats will certainly want to nationalize the Minister of Energy. What's more likely, however, is that Alberta's ridiculous position will be laughed out of court. To the

Minister of Environment: will the minister table in this Assembly any legal opinions the government has obtained that support the proposition that CO₂ emitted by coal-fired power plants, SUVs, and, yes, even people breathing is a natural resource under the Constitution of Canada?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, let me clearly give you an example of how CO₂ is a natural resource. We are presently working with the government of Saskatchewan. We're working with EnCana Energy and pumping CO₂ out of North Dakota into southern Saskatchewan to help in the recovery of oil. It goes down into the ground and helps the recovery of oil, so CO₂ is very clearly a natural resource that has an economic benefit to it.

MR. MASON: Well, Mr. Speaker, if CO₂ is indeed a natural resource, will the government commit to capturing most or all of the CO₂ emitted in Alberta and then obtain the best possible price for it on international markets?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I'd like to thank that member for such a fine question. If he's read our plan and understands what we're trying to do in our greenhouse gas reduction plan, one of the issues we have in Alberta is that we have two sources, Mr. Speaker, that are producing over 50 percent of our greenhouse gases, 50 to 55 percent. Those two sources are the oil industry and coal-fired power plants. Now, as we spend money through the Minister of Innovation and Science's budget on research to separate the streams so we can separate the NO_x, the SO_x, and the particulate matter from CO₂ and get a clear and pure stream of CO₂ – we can collect it at these major sources – yes, as we go forward, we would like to see a pipeline in Alberta that is specifically for CO₂, that can be utilized in economic recovery and stored underground.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has anticipated my third question, which I'll ask anyway. Can the minister please tell Albertans what plan the government has for value-added manufacturing for this wonderful new resource industry? Or are they just going to build a pipeline and ship it all to the U.S.?

DR. TAYLOR: Since I've already answered his question, you know, there's no reason for me to answer it again, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ticketing by Special Constables

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through discussions with local municipalities it's been brought to my attention that the overall policy of police patrols along primary highways has been altered. Specifically, the town of Penhold has been advised that the town can no longer ticket traffic violations through the town of Penhold along highway 2A, even though Penhold school is adjacent to highway 2A and the majority of students must cross 2A multiple times each day. My questions today are to the Solicitor General. Is it true that the Department of the Solicitor General has stated that special constables can no longer ticket on primary highways, including those highways that run through municipalities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that, first of all, special constables have never had the authority to ticket on primary highways – never. They have the authority to ticket on secondary highways, but when secondary highways were changed to primary highways from Alberta Transportation, we agreed to allow that to happen till after the policing review.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's frustration, but my number one priority in my department is to ensure that the highways are safely manned by fully trained and qualified officers and that the residents in that area receive effective and adequate policing. Special constables do not have the same training and qualifications as police officers. Special constables are also not paid at the same level as fully qualified police officers. While this makes it a little more affordable for jurisdictions, they are not qualified to perform all of the duties of a police officer, including enforcement of the Highway Traffic Act on primary highways.

2:20

MR. OUELLETTE: I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong here, but I thought that 2A always was a primary highway.

What is the hon. minister doing to address concerns of local residents that the RCMP feel that the local detachment will not be able to provide the level of service on this highway that the community has been accustomed to?

MRS. FORSYTH: The member is correct: highway 2A is a primary highway, and the responsibility is that of the RCMP. I understand his frustration. We have called the assistant commissioner of the RCMP. We have said to him: your responsibility is to man that particular highway. My understanding is that the assistant commissioner of K Division is meeting with the town of Penhold's staff sergeant this week.

MR. OUELLETTE: So can you tell me, then, hon. minister: are you going to refund all the money that's been ticketed by these constables in the past?

MRS. FORSYTH: It's been brought to our attention by the hon. member, and he can bring it back to our attention at any time.

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

Impact of Climate Change on Health

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's come to public attention in the last few days that there's been a surge in deaths in Ontario from the West Nile virus, which is carried by mosquitoes which are spreading into Canada from the south as a result of climate change. As well, we have a medical officer of health, Dr. David Swann, fired from his job for expressing professional concern over the health impact of climate change. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister have plans to amend regulations to protect the job security of medical officers of health?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, regional health authorities throughout the province have looked at the issue involving Dr. Swann. In fact, the relevant health authority, in this case Palliser, had also looked at its practice with respect to how it had dealt with Dr. Swann. It made every effort to bring Dr. Swann back. There were a number of comments that he made on the conditions upon which he would return to being the medical officer for Palliser. I understand that the board made that offer. Dr. Swann has now decided to go to Iraq instead and practise his profession in Iraq. Each regional health

authority has looked at this particular issue, and I think that they are dealing with it appropriately.

DR. TAFT: I'd say that in short, then, there are no plans to protect the job security of medical officers of health.

My second question is to the same minister. Has any attempt been made by the government to measure the health impact of climate change on Albertans?

MR. MAR: I think that the Minister of Environment is well on this particular file, Mr. Speaker. We do co-ordinate with work that is being done out of his department. Our focus has really been on things that are much more closely associated with issues related to health care. We are more concerned about ensuring, for example, that people get the highest level of cardiac care in this province. We made an outstanding announcement today about our continued support for a cardiac centre here in the city of Edmonton. That is more meritorious of our consideration than the issue raised by the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that earlier this year the Minister of Energy said that if climate change affected the health of one child, he would recommend against resisting Kyoto, will the Minister of Health and Wellness or the Minister of Environment ensure that the health effects of climate change are made a priority in this government's climate change plans?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, again, I think this is a different way of asking the same question. I have complete confidence in the ability of the Minister of Environment to deal with these issues and that we will co-ordinate. The Minister of Environment has the issue well in hand. If he were to come to me and suggest that there is credible evidence that it is a health issue, then, yes, I would bring it forward.

THE SPEAKER: The minister to supplement.

DR. TAYLOR: I'd just like to clarify this kind of misinformation that the Liberals and the federal Liberals continue to put out. They assume that the brown smog, which is causing health conditions, is an issue covered under Kyoto. [interjection] The only brown smog we have in here is from you, Dr. Taft.

As we go forward, Mr. Speaker, it's quite clear that Kyoto is about greenhouse gases, 98 and a half percent of which is carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we proceed to Recognitions, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 14 students from St. Albert Catholic high school who are here in the public gallery today. They are accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Tamie Bentz and by the student teacher who is with them this week, Ms Sophy Norng. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the great pleasure of introducing on behalf of my colleague from Sherwood Park 51 important people who are from the Woodbridge Farms elementary school. They are here with their teachers and group leaders Mrs. Busch, Ms Ackerman, Mrs. Setchell, and parent helpers Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Joly, Mrs. Bourque, Mrs. Field, and Mrs. Schaffler. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

**Lud Prudek
Stan Price
James Helm**

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's inductees into the Agriculture Hall of Fame were recognized for pioneering work in crop and livestock industry research and development. In addition to these achievements, each inductee has been a key individual in the creation of industry associations and actively involved in communication and development in their area.

Lud Prudek from Bow Island is recognized for his leadership role in initiating and developing dry bean pulse crops into a hundred million dollar Canadian industry. He also made significant contributions to other specialty crops and pioneered gated pipe irrigation.

Stan Price from Acme led the development of vertically integrated food production from farmer to consumer and is the founder of the Sunterra markets retail chain. Stan pioneered the development of modern hog market production practices, promoted the need for national grading standards and development of value-added processing.

Dr. James Helm's work in the area of feed grain development led to the creation of 23 new varieties of barley and triticale, establishing Alberta's Field Crop Development Centre in Lacombe as a worldwide leader in scientific excellence, productivity, and innovation in cereal breeding programs. He's also recognized for his significant contribution to the development of the Canada/Alberta barley agreement.

I know that all members of this Assembly will join me in recognizing these outstanding Albertans and their outstanding achievements and congratulate them on their induction to the Alberta Agriculture Hall of Fame.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: As the hon. member violated the one-minute rule, I will not be calling on him for a second recognition.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Tom Maccagno

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to recognize Mr. Tom Maccagno from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency, who was recently presented with the very prestigious Canada's recreation fisheries award. Tom Maccagno has been actively dedicated to fishery resources in Alberta for over the past 30 years. He has played an instrumental role in the education of people across the country on the importance of a balanced fish habitat and the preservation of their populations. Tom was involved in the establishment of the provincial walleye and pike task forces

and has been a frequent spokesman on behalf of fisheries and fish habitat. He can also be credited with the act of support and involvement in the development of the Alexander Hamilton park, which is a fish enhancement project in Lac La Biche.

Each year the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada honours five deserving individuals or organizations for their contribution to the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of Canada's recreational fisheries and their habitat. Mr. Maccagno was one of these fine recipients, and I would like you to join me in congratulating this dedicated Albertan for his accomplishments.

Thank you.

National Child Day

DR. MASSEY: Today is National Child Day. The theme this year is: A World Fit for Children. This theme grows out of the commitments made at the 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children. Making the world fit for children requires a comprehensive, affordable, and accessible education system.

In Alberta we've made little progress. At the postsecondary level our efforts are a national embarrassment. Many European countries like Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden ensure an accessible system by not charging tuition fees. Our record is dismal. Declining government support has resulted in tuition covering more and more of postsecondary schools' operating costs. The withdrawal of government funding has seriously limited accessibility for lower- and middle-income families. High-income families were two and a half times more likely as those from low-income families to have attended university in 1998. One can only surmise that the increases have made the problem worse.

On this National Child Day we should be assuring youth from low-income families that qualifying students will find our institutions accessible and affordable.

Count of Homeless Persons

MS BLAKEMAN: On October 23 I participated in the fifth Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton organized by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing. Teams of volunteers surveyed people at drop-in centres, libraries, bottle depots, and in certain areas on the street and in the river valley. Organizers commented on how many people had expressed an interest in the homeless situation and had come out to help. As a result, the count was able to take in areas of Whyte Avenue, downtown, Stony Plain Road, Boyle/McCauley, and near the Skyreach Centre. The results of the count will be announced this Friday, November 22, as part of National Housing Day and are expected to help identify the magnitude of the problem and what changes, if any, have occurred since the last count.

I'm looking to this government to react to this count with concrete plans and targets to reduce homelessness and increase the stock of affordable accommodations. With matching money available from the feds, this province is able to do more. Buying more flop mats is not a long-term solution.

Thank you.

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

McHappy Day

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the 13th McHappy Day in McDonald's Canada history. Since 1977 more than \$16 million for Ronald McDonald children's charities across Canada has been raised with one simple objective: to help children in need. This year McHappy Day is being held in Canada in support

of World Children's Day, representing an unprecedented worldwide effort to benefit children in need everywhere.

This morning I was invited by Dola Ritter to join the team at St. Albert's downtown McDonald's restaurant in helping to raise funds for three specific projects in our communities. First of all, the Ronald McDonald House is raising funds for an expansion to the house. As Edmonton has become a major pediatric treatment centre, the house has become very busy and waiting lists are commonplace. The Stollery Children's Health Foundation is raising funds for the Cochrane Collaboration. The focus is to build an on-line resource library available worldwide. The Juvenile Diabetes Foundation is also benefiting.

National Child Day

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, today 350 children and youth gathered at the Winspear Centre in Edmonton to celebrate National Child Day. We celebrated the United Nations Rights of the Child, that demands nourishment and protection for all children everywhere. Eleven-year-old Camille Holland sang the national anthem with the voice of an angel, accompanied by students of the Suzuki charter school. The Kokopelli Youth Choir sang with rhythm that energized the atmosphere. The City Centre Education Project Band played *Song of the Serengeti*, and I heard the wind rustling through the trees and the animals grazing in the grass. A presentation on freedom of expression by a group known as Youth One proved to me that our children and youth, of which we have 840,000, making us the youngest population of all the provinces, are growing strong and healthy in this province.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are some children who are not growing strong and healthy in this province, and it is time that we as a society change our weak words and meaningless platitudes into actions that truly protect our children. Demand from the good people of Canada that we raise the age of consent from 14 to 16. Demand that child pornography not be accepted as art, and demand that child poverty be eliminated. Then and only then can we truly celebrate National Child Day.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. HORNER: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to present a petition signed by 77 Albertans in my constituency petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to deinsure abortion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 83 Albertans urging the government to "not delist services, raise health care premiums, introduce user fees or further privatize health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here today approved for presentation by Parliamentary Counsel signed by 40 Albertans regarding the deinsuring of abortion.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: On a Standing Order 30 application, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give notice that later on this afternoon I plan to make a motion under Standing Order 30, and I await your further direction.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, did you have a second one? Standing Order 40?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, I certainly do, Mr. Speaker. I would like again, and following your direction, to propose a motion, this time in regard to the democratic deficit that exists in this province, at the time instructed from the Speaker's chair.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Bill 33**North Red Deer Water Authorization Act**

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I am pleased to introduce some groundbreaking legislation. It's called Bill 33, the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring a healthy and adequate and sustainable drinking water supply for all Albertans is important for this government; in fact, a top priority. And that's what this act does. When passed by this Assembly, this legislation will ensure safe drinking water to Lacombe, Ponoka, Blackfalds, Red Deer, and the First Nations community at Hobbema. This is a community-led solution, community-led direction, and I think it's going to be excellent legislation, so I'm pleased to introduce it.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned in this House, the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties is meeting this weekend. I'd like to table today the requisite number of copies of a resolution that was endorsed by the entire association that was initiated by the central Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, where it briefly says that: the AAMD and C relative to the Kyoto resolution support the province's position on Kyoto, urging the government of Canada to delay any vote on the ratification until a workable implementation plan is in place consulting all provinces.

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

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Edmonton's mayor and city council supporting Bill 212, the Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2002, which will be introduced as Bill 206 in the spring 2003 session. This legislation would allow police officers to seize vehicles or provide an alternative measures program for offenders involved in

prostitution-related offences in an effort to reduce the negative effects of street prostitution in Alberta's communities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. 2:40

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first is 36 letters from constituents asking that the abortion procedure that is currently paid for by Alberta Health be deinsured.

The second is a letter encouraging the government to officially confirm square dancing as the official folk dance of Alberta, and that is followed by 131 signatories.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from a constituent in support of ratifying the Kyoto accord. They make note that "the actions of the Alberta government on the Kyoto Protocol constitute a violation of Alberta's membership in this international community."

Thank you.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to me by Mr. Chad Axling of St. Albert requesting the designation of the Bighorn wildland recreation area as a wildland park, using the original 1986 boundaries.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. My first tabling is a letter from the municipal district of Northern Lights No. 22 addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness expressing their deep concern over the Peace health region board's decision to cut active care beds in Grimshaw and to reduce preventative health services in their municipality.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling is a document from the Lakeland regional health authority pointing out the Minister of Health and Wellness's high-handed approach to health care. It also accuses the provincial government of downloading the ambulance operational costs to municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise at this time to table five copies of a document. It's a program called: A Celebration and Reflection of 100 years of Quality Craftsmanship. It's the program to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters & Joiners in Alberta. They have existed in this province since 1902 and helped, as a matter of fact, in the construction of this very Assembly. There are notices of congratulations in here from the Governor General, the Prime Minister and, certainly, the Premier of Alberta. It is noteworthy that this organization has celebrated its 100th anniversary and looks forward to contributing to the prosperity of this province for another 100 years.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before proceeding, then, to Orders of the Day, we have some parliamentary business to attend to. If I understand this correctly, we have a point of order that was raised by

the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, a point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we have a point of privilege to deal with that stems from yesterday, and we have a Standing Order 30 application and a Standing Order 40 application from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. So let's proceed in this way: first of all, the point of order presented by the Hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). Under 23(h), as we will all know, it is improper for a member in this House to make allegations against another member. Under 23(i) it's improper, also, to impute a false or unavowed motive to another member, and under 23(j) it's improper to use the kind of language that might create disorder.

Now, having said that, it's my recollection, Mr. Speaker, that during the heat, the cut and thrust, as they say, of debate, as part of his preamble to a question to the hon. minister of health the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that being the leader of the ND opposition, indicated words that he avowed, which are not true, toward the Premier. I don't have the Blues. I've requested them, but they haven't been prepared yet. But I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona gave an indication that he'd somewhere thought he heard, saw, or read that our Premier had indicated something to the effect that rural hospitals are nothing more than local employment centres or words to that effect. I know that's not true, and I think that everyone else here knows that's not true, so I would simply ask in the spirit of the understanding of this House that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona kindly do the honourable thing and simply withdraw the remark since it's clearly not true. It's clearly false, and it obviously has been used in some very purported and totally out-of-context way, even though, I stress, I know it's not true. So I will give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona the opportunity to please withdraw that comment.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you're participating in this?

MR. MASON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To respond to the assistant Government House Leader's point of order, I have here the words attributed to the hon. leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that are in fact correct, and I would beg to indicate the two articles from the *Edmonton Journal* in which the Premier was quoted. Here on the 17th of November the Premier was quoted as saying that "hospitals do employ people, but they do not survive, they do not exist, to accommodate employment." The next day, on the 18th of November, the Premier's comment was:

Our government and our party have to keep in mind that the health system does not exist primarily as an employment agency or a local economic tool, said Klein. That's the message I'm trying to get out there today. It's going to affect us all and it's going to take some courage.

So, Mr. Speaker, while the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona may have exaggerated slightly the meaning of the Premier, it is clear that the Premier has made similar comments, and I have not seen any attempt on the part of the Premier to correct this reporting through letters to the editor or otherwise.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, is this on a similar point of order? You also indicated that you wanted to raise a point of order. Are we talking about the same subject matter? I'd

like to bring them all together if I can. If not, I'll deal with these two points of order separately.

DR. PANNU: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I heard the Premier utter a word or two while I was raising the question. He called: it's a lie. Then I heard the Minister of Finance say something to the effect: you're a liar. It's a serious matter.

My point of order is intended to draw attention to the use of these words, which I hope you will consider as unparliamentary. *Beauchesne* 485 under Unparliamentary Language does require the members of the Assembly to be careful in the use of words and certainly not use the words "you're a liar" in addressing other members or what other members say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point of order. Now, I've put the two of them together. We'll deal with them both.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I wanted to deal with the first one first. If you'll allow it, I'll do that, and then we'll talk about the second one.

THE SPEAKER: Yes.

2:50

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Okay. Thanks. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Highlands raising the point that he just raised, and I am aware of what was in the particular paper as referenced, even though I know that we don't like to get into those things. I think that if the member reads the entire quote and puts it into context, the intention there was simply to say that hospitals, of course, do employ people and they certainly do not exist only for that purpose, because it goes on to say that they exist for "people who are sick and injured," to accommodate those people. So if you read it all in context, I think that clears that matter up.

With respect to things that may have been said across the bow that probably aren't in *Hansard*, I believe the hon. Minister of Finance has a statement to make.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I did use the words: the hon. member told a lie. I should not have done that. I should have said: made an untrue statement. So I would like to retract "lie" but put in "untrue statement."

THE SPEAKER: Anybody else want to participate in these two very important points of order?

Well, thank you very much for that. Here is what was said. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona:

Mr. Speaker, the minister is going to have a hard time selling his solution to rural Albertans.

My last question to him: does the minister agree with the Premier when the Premier insulted rural Albertans by describing their hospitals and health facilities as nothing more than local employment centres?

Then the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness:

Well, first of all, two things, Mr. Speaker. What the hon. member said is patently untrue. And secondly, in answering his question about who has the interests of rural Albertans best in mind: the caucus that is represented in the government of Alberta. I can't name one NDP member from rural Alberta.

Well, let's just deal with some of these things. First of all, thank you very much, hon. Minister of Finance. Her remarks were not picked up in *Hansard*, at least definable to her, so she has come clean by admitting in the House that she was responsible for them.

That's the honourable thing to do. That is the honourable thing to do.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona violated the rule of this House about preambles by including a preamble on the last question, which was, of course, a no-no, which, of course, then gets other people excited. The question itself, you know, is rather arguable in terms of:

My last question to him: does the minister agree with the Premier when the Premier insulted rural Albertans by describing their hospitals and health facilities as nothing more than local employment centres?

Okay. It could be argued that it might be out of order because it doesn't really deal with government policy. What it does is attempt to get personal views and opinions. Then the response from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: "What the hon. member said is patently untrue." It didn't call him a liar, but there's an oblique way of basically saying the same thing.

I guess the whole point of this is that we arrive in this place and we do get excited and we do get moved, and strict adherence to all of the rules would have ruled out the question and probably ruled out the answer and would have forced another intervention from the Speaker, which meant that, really, question period would not become very interesting to too many people other than the Speaker, who would say that this is really boring. Hon. members like the flow and the back and forth, but I think that if we temper it with decent language and if we temper it with overall understanding and the whole thing, we'll serve everybody a lot better.

If quotes are attributed to statements in newspapers and the like, we've always followed the tradition that we're not going to ascertain the truth of anything found in newspapers, but I guess it is used by hon. members from time to time to make the point, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona did today, and it elicited responses. I think the key thing to all of this is let's just try and avoid the hostility, and if we do it with some degree of humour, then I suppose that some people will say, "Well, that's witty," and that's the highest form of debate that we can aspire to and attain. So, all in all, let's say that we've dealt with those two points of order.

Privilege

Contempt of the Assembly

THE SPEAKER: Now we will hear further with respect to the point of privilege that was raised yesterday by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. When we left it yesterday, the Government House Leader basically was given an opportunity to return today for comments with respect to this matter, but before we get to that, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if he has anything more to say with respect to this point of privilege. Or shall I just proceed to recognize?

MR. MacDONALD: No, Mr. Speaker. Please proceed to recognize.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Then the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start by repeating the comments of the House leader yesterday; namely, that we still believe that it is not, with all due respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the stuff of privilege. Nonetheless, the government agrees that the word "government" should have been in front of "MLA committee" in the advertisement.

Its absence was an oversight. There was no intention to breach the rights of this building and its members. Let's be serious here for one second. Can anyone in this Chamber today say that their rights or

the rights of this building were trampled upon by an oversight about a word in front of "MLA committee"? Everyone on that committee is an MLA, thus it can technically be called an MLA committee. To be properly titled, it should have said: government MLA committee. But in fairness to this side, it was not called a legislative committee; it was not called a Legislative Assembly committee; it was not called an all-party committee. It was called what it was because that is what it was.

In hindsight, in light of this issue being brought to our attention, the government apologizes. It will be called the government MLA committee in the future. But, surely, this is not the stuff of privilege. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In listening to the hon. member, the Deputy Government House Leader, I certainly hope that this will not happen again. I have certainly a different opinion, but the authority, the dignity, and the performance of the functions of this House and its members go across the province.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind all hon. members of this Assembly that committees such as this, in my view, have no basis in law, and they cannot offer witnesses that are called to testify before them the parliamentary privilege of being immune to civil action for defamation or slander arising from any of the comments that they may make before that committee. So I think it's very, very important, and one cannot forget that there should be all-party committees formed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on this point I believe that this matter appears to have been resolved. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was completely within his rights, and he followed all the procedures that we have by notifying my office correctly and by applying under Standing Order 15(2).

I think, as well, that the highest possible resolution of this issue was afforded to the House yesterday in the best traditions of parliamentary democracy by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, when he did offer alternatives. I'm pleased to say today that the Deputy Government House Leader has taken up the alternative, and I think we've concluded this matter with a better understanding of the distinctions between the legislative branches and the executive branches and the importance of keeping them apart from one another. So thank you very much for that.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a Standing Order 30 application.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

Electoral Boundaries

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly will be brief, and I hope that there will be a sense of urgency with this Standing Order 30. When I look up in the public gallery and I see that 33 percent of the people are already asleep, I'd better be very brief with this.

For the record:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance – namely, the issue of urban and rural split – particularly in the context of electoral district distribution, which is listed as a priority in the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, where it is proposed that the city of Edmonton lose one district, specifically, and unfortunately in my view, the district of Edmonton-

Norwood, which has had a significant history of over 50 years in this Assembly, and it has been represented by Progressive Conservative members, New Democrat members, and Liberal members.

However, when I rise today, Mr. Speaker, I certainly urge debate in this Assembly on the interim report. The interim report, which was tabled in this Assembly yesterday afternoon, on page 24 states, "The Legislative Assembly needs to give priority to seriously considering how the urban/rural split issue will be addressed in the future." On the next page it states in bold type as well, "The Legislative Assembly should consider the resources allocated for constituency offices." In order for the commission to carry on from the interim report to the final report, it is my view that we urgently need to discuss the interim report and, if possible, give some further direction to the committee.

3:00

This is a very important matter. The issue which is defined as a priority in the interim report, which we discussed, has caused friction in the past in our province. There's no doubt about that, especially when it comes to the matters of electoral distribution. Mr. Speaker, this is an urgent matter, again, because there has been an increasing sense of alienation between the rural and urban populations not only in the province but, unfortunately, across the country. This issue needs to be debated before any further actions, in my view, are taken by the commission.

The interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission has made several points which, if implemented, will increase the friction again between rural and urban Albertans. Rural Alberta stands to lose two seats under the proposed boundary redistribution. The city of Edmonton stands to lose one. In my view, not only should we keep the 19 in the city; we should be getting another one as well. Each side of the debate . . . [interjection] Yes. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to discuss this now, and we cannot allow any more confusing statements to be made on the urban/rural issue. We need to speak about the province as a whole, the economic growth that's occurring, the dramatic growth that's occurring not only in Calgary but, certainly, in Edmonton.

In conclusion, I would urge all members to support this motion because it is very, very important not only for the city of Edmonton but for the entire province. I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to the comments of other hon. members of the Assembly in regard to Standing Order 30. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: If hon. members wish to participate, I would invite a brief participation on the urgency of the Standing Order 30 application. However, hon. members should know that I am prepared to rule.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Just a few comments, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of urgency. The wording of the motion is interesting in that it's not completely clear what the discussion is to be. If we're talking about an urban/rural split, which seems to be the focus – clearly that is the case today; I'm sure it will be the case tomorrow – and if it is a question that Edmonton is losing a seat due to an unjust formula for splitting the province into urban and rural seats, then I would make these points.

The Assembly does have before it an interim report from the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and no final report has been tabled. Concerns about the proposed map should not be debated here as an emergent matter but brought up during the next round of Electoral Boundaries Commission's consults scheduled for December. The commission, which is looking at redrawing boundaries, is

comprised of five members: two proposed by the opposition, two proposed by government, as well as a respected Albertan as the chair. To declare that we need an emergency debate on what they are doing before they are finished doing it shows a lack of faith in the commission and its all-party appointees.

There's a suggestion in this application that the drawing of electoral boundaries should not pay any attention to the split between urban and rural ridings, but the act which governs the work of the commission specifically states that those, other than the chair, who are appointed to the commission must be a resident in a city and the other a resident outside a city at the time of their appointment, which is a fairly clear indication that the law expects the urban/rural dichotomy of this province to be fairly taken into account when the commission does its work. For all of those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I submit that there is no need for an emergency debate under Standing Order 30.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, we're only debating urgency here, nothing else. The only word I want to hear from members is "urgency," why this Assembly should abandon the work scheduled for today to focus on this motion. I don't want to hear any arguments other than urgency. Just urgency.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASZYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You've made it quite clear. The only thing is that I have only about two seconds to try and change gears here to follow your instruction. However, it is my constituency that is at hand, so I felt somewhat obligated to bring sort of a defence forward. But on the note that you brought forward regarding urgency, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore made it quite clear on urgency too, and I would probably lean in favour of him. Nevertheless, I do bring mine forward. It is my constituency, and that's why I felt compelled to bring a defence forward.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on the point of urgency, in fact, the Deputy Government House Leader made the point. There is only one opportunity for us to discuss this prior to the final submissions being made to the commission. They have made the interim submission, they are taking a few more submissions, and then there will be a final report. That report is binding subject only to a court challenge, and therefore it is of absolute importance that this is the very last chance we have to debate this particular issue which is hugely important to many, many Albertans. So I would urge you to rule in favour of the urgency of this particular point as made by the Deputy Government House Leader.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly, there is no urgency, and this is not the only opportunity that anybody could debate it. As a matter of fact, when the final report is submitted and as it goes through the parliamentary process, it will in fact be in this Assembly, where the legislation is impacted. That is the place where you can debate it. That's what this place is for.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. On this point, hon. members, first of all, under Standing Order 30 the onus is on the hon. member to bring it to the attention of the House at the earliest possible opportunity.

That earliest opportunity would have been yesterday, not today. That could have been ruled out only on that one technical point as it is.

Secondly, what's the process? The process is simply that this Assembly has created by way of a motion a decision of this Assembly that there be an independent Electoral Boundaries Commission. This Electoral Boundaries Commission was given its mandate from this Assembly. It's absolutely correct, then, that five individuals were appointed to this commission on the basis of appointments by the Speaker upon the recommendation of two from the Premier, two from the Leader of the Official Opposition. There is some protection with respect to that for hon. members.

The commission then went forth, did its thing, submitted an interim report, which was provided to all members a few days ago but tabled in the House yesterday. The commission has already advertised that it will be hearing additional comments from individuals by a certain date. I believe it was sometime in November that they were hearing submissions, and they will be holding some public hearings or meetings sometime in December.

By the law of this Assembly it has to provide its final report back to this Assembly, as I recall, by March 24 of the year 2003, at which point in time that report will come to this Assembly for full, thorough debate, and it is the members of this Assembly who will make the final decision on what will be implemented, not the commission. This Assembly must pass appropriate legislation with respect to that matter. There will be ample opportunity, as there has been in the past.

Hon. members should know that I've been through this now on at least three or four occasions with respect to electoral boundaries and redistribution, and the final say with respect to it will be made by the men and women of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. So this particular application today basically says that it wants to interfere with the process, and until we get a final report, I don't know how this could be viewed as urgent. This is not applicable under Standing Order 30.

3:10

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Standing Order 40 requires unanimous consent of the Assembly. Make your argument.

Election of Committee Chairs

Mr. MacDonald:

Be it resolved that this Assembly move immediately to amend the Standing Orders to allow committee chairs to be elected by secret ballot by all Members of the Legislative Assembly so that democracy, transparent government, and parliamentary reform may be brought to Alberta as well.

MR. MACDONALD: Now, Mr. Speaker – and it's on the Order Paper today under Government Motion 32 – we see the motion as presented by the hon. Member for Ponoka-Rimbey yesterday. We look at some of the legislative committee chairs, that include the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the hon. Member for Leduc; as well as the chairs of the standing policy committees, which include, for the record, Justice and Government Services, Learning and Employment, Energy and Sustainable Development, Agriculture and Municipal Affairs, Health and Community Development, Economic Development and Finance. I see no reason in light of this motion – I shall call it Motion 32, that's currently on the Order Paper – why, if we're going to talk about electing Senators and we're going to have a better democracy as a

result, we could not elect in this Assembly these committee chairs as well. Certainly we elect the Speaker, the Chair of Committees, the deputies. Why not elect the standing policy committees?

Now, Mr. Speaker, on the statement of urgency and the absolute necessity of this motion, I will be brief. This motion is of urgent necessity for several other reasons. The first is that we have a discussion which will be coming our way in the near future to recommend democratic reforms for government in this country. While this is a positive step, it is urgent and pressing that this government also show our intention for democracy and parliamentary reform in our province before we start prescribing it to others. Secondly, this motion is urgent because the good people of this province who have long been in favour of democratic reform want it at all levels of government.

Now, this motion will show to Albertans and, indeed, to all of Canada this Assembly's true feeling that democracy is a precious and valuable resource. The urgency and true necessity of protecting democracy at the first opportunity must be a priority of all elected officials. The federal House of Commons had all-party support to pass a similar motion, and if we do not have the same, it shows that Alberta itself is suffering from a democratic deficit.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, if we do not act quickly on ensuring democracy in Alberta, how can we ask others to do the same? Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's a Standing Order 40 application the hon. members will determine. It requires the unanimous consent to proceed.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving a number of motions relevant to the supplementary supply estimates, I wish to advise that this morning I provided the government's 2002-2003 quarterly budget report for the second quarter to all MLAs.

We have also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. I am now tabling this quarterly budget report as the amended consolidated financial plan. This revised plan is required by section 8 of the same act whenever a second set of estimates is tabled during the fiscal year.

I am also tabling, Mr. Speaker, the second quarterly activity report for 2002-2003. This document describes the major achievements of our government during the recent period.

I now wish to table the 2002-2003 supplementary estimates. These supplementary estimates will provide additional spending authority to eight departments of the government. When passed, these estimates will authorize an \$822,853,000 increase in voted operating expense and capital investment.

head: **Government Motions**

29. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2002-03 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 29 carried]

30. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2002-03 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 30 carried]

Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Ombudsman Search Committee

31. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that

- (1) A Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Ombudsman Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed consisting of the following members – namely, Mrs. Tarchuk, chair; Mr. Ducharme, deputy chair; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Friedel; Ms Graham; Mrs. O'Neill; Dr. Pannu; Dr. Taft; and Mr. Tannas – for the purpose of inviting applications for the positions of Ethics Commissioner and Ombudsman and to recommend to the Assembly the applicants it considers most suitable for appointment to those positions.
- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowance order.
- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (4) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (5) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (6) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is then sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

[Government Motion 31 carried]

Senate Appointments

32. Mr. Jonson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta affirm its support for an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to provide for an elected Senate which would represent the interests of all provinces through equal representation and through effective powers and, further, that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta urge the government of Alberta to

undertake consultations with all provincial governments on this amendment and, further, that pending such an amendment the Legislative Assembly of Alberta call upon the Prime Minister to summon to the Senate to fill vacancies relating to Alberta only those who are Senate nominees pursuant to the Senatorial Selection Act of Alberta and, further, that the Assembly confirm the recommendations of the report of the Select Special Committee on Upper House Reform, which were unanimously endorsed by this Assembly on May 27, 1985, and again on March 10, 1987.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

3:20

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The resolution before the Assembly does two things. First, it is a strong statement in favour of an elected, equal, and effective Canadian Senate; in other words, a triple E Senate. It affirms Alberta's desire for a Senate that represents provincial interests within our federal system, and it reconfirms this Assembly's endorsement of the recommendations of the Select Special Committee on Upper House Reform, previously endorsed in May 1985 and March 1987.

Second, Mr. Speaker, the resolution calls for the Prime Minister to appoint one of Alberta's Senate nominees to the Senate. In 1998 Albertans elected two individuals to represent our province in the Senate, and the Prime Minister has so far refused to appoint them. In my view, this a rejection of the democratic value shared by all Canadians. This month Senator Nick Taylor retired from the Senate, which means that the Prime Minister will soon be appointing an Albertan to the Senate. It is the perfect opportunity for him to show support for democracy by appointing one of Alberta's Senate nominees. This resolution clearly and firmly calls for him to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, in considering this resolution, it is helpful to review some of the recent history of Senate reform discussions and especially Alberta's role in them. Reforming Canada's Senate is not, by any means, a new idea. In fact, discussions of reforming or changing the upper House are as old as the country itself. It is not a new issue, but it's certainly an issue that has gained prominence in the last 20 years. During that time Alberta has been a leader in calling for Senate reform.

In 1982, on the heels of much heated anger and resentment in the province over the national energy program, the Alberta government issued a discussion paper called a Provincially-Appointed Senate. The paper was designed to stimulate discussion within Alberta and across western Canada about gaining greater provincial representation in Ottawa through a reformed Senate. The paper proposed that Senators be nominated by the provinces and that the Senate be more focused on representing provincial interests. These ideas led to much interest and discussion among Albertans and western Canadians, and the Alberta government responded by creating a legislative Committee on Senate Reform in 1983.

The committee was given the mandate to examine the appropriate role, functions, and structure of the Senate within Canada's federal system and to make recommendations for change. Headed by then MLA Dennis Anderson, the committee studied the issue thoroughly, held a series of public meetings, and received submissions from many Albertans. In March 1985 the committee tabled its report entitled *Strengthening Canada, Reform of Canada's Senate*. The report called for Senators to be elected, for an equal number of Senators from each province, and for the Senate to be given effective powers. Essentially, it was the birth of the idea of a triple E Senate. In May 1985 the Legislative Assembly voted unanimously to accept

in principle the recommendations of the report, and I was honoured to be able to participate in that debate.

Mr. Speaker, the momentum in favour of Senate reform continued through the annual Premiers' conferences in 1986 and 1987, and reform of the upper House was included as part of the Meech Lake accord in 1987. The accord set the stage for future constitutional negotiations on Senate reform. Support for an elected Senate expanded to other parts of Canada in 1987 and 1988 and was endorsed by a special joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons and by a National Conference on Senate Reform held at the University of Alberta.

In 1988 Alberta elected its first Senator, Mr. Stan Waters, and he was appointed to the Senate by Prime Minister Mulroney in 1990. Mr. Waters represented Albertans very well until his death in 1991. He stands as the first and only elected Senator in Canadian history, and I certainly hope he is not the last.

Mr. Speaker, with the failure of the Meech Lake accord in 1990, constitutional negotiations began once again, and this time a triple E Senate was included in the negotiations, thanks, I think we can say, to Alberta's leadership. In 1992 a final agreement was reached, the Charlottetown accord, and it included a reformed Senate that would be elected and, for the first time, have equal representation from the provinces. There was much debate as to whether or not it would be effective in representing provincial interests. In the end, the majority of Canadians voted against the accord, and constitutional negotiations moved to the back burner. However, Albertans never gave up on the idea of Senate reform, and neither did the Alberta government.

In 1998 Alberta conducted another election to choose two Senator nominees. More than 890,000 valid ballots were cast, and two individuals were elected: Mr. Bert Brown and Mr. Ted Morton. To date the Prime Minister has refused to appoint either of them to the Senate, even though he has had two opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999 Alberta amended the Senatorial Selection Act to allow Senate elections to be held prior to Alberta vacancies opening in the Senate. This was in response to the Prime Minister's refusal to acknowledge the hon. Premier's repeated requests that he hold off on filling vacancies until Albertans have had an opportunity to select their choice in an election.

Looking back over the last 20 years, it is clear that Alberta has been a leader in calling for Senate reform. Our province has done more than talk about it. We have taken action by putting forward solid proposals and giving Albertans the opportunity to have a say in who will represent them in the Senate. This resolution is another step in that process.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this resolution is coming at the appropriate time for two reasons. First, it has become very clear that we need improved provincial representation at the federal level. In recent years we have seen the federal government ignore provincial interests on a host of issues. Currently, we are concerned about the Kyoto protocol. The matter of gun control is still very much an issue. The Wheat Board is another topic that would benefit from discussion by such a body as an elected Senate. A whole host of municipal issues are on the list. Those are only a few of the topics that I think would benefit.

Alberta has had to lead the way in opposing many of these issues through costly court challenges, public awareness campaigns, and other approaches. Mr. Speaker, if we'd had a triple E Senate in Ottawa, these efforts may not have been necessary, but as it stands now, the Senate fails to represent provincial interests in any tangible way. Its powers are, at least to some degree, only theoretical. It does not have equal representation from the provinces, and it is made up of appointed individuals only.

Mr. Speaker, the second reason that the time is appropriate for this resolution is that democratic reform has once again come to the forefront of federal politics. The discussions so far have centered on procedural reforms within the House of Commons and giving backbench Members of Parliament increased influence in federal decision-making, but there's no reason that Senate reform cannot be part of these discussions. It would be interesting to know what the Liberals in Ottawa who are leading the discussions on democratic reform think about Senate reform. This resolution, I hope, will lead to that question being asked. Alberta has an opportunity to once again take the initiative and push Senate reform back onto the national agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks by calling on the Members of the Legislative Assembly to take a stand on this issue and to support this motion.

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

Point of Order Dividing a Motion

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin debate on this motion, I would like to get some procedural advice from the chair, if possible. I rise in regard to *Beauchesne* 557(1) and page 478 of *Marleau and Montpetit*. *Beauchesne* 557(1) says:

A motion which contains two or more distinct propositions may be divided so that the sense of the House may be taken on each separately. The Speaker has a discretionary power to decide whether a motion should be divided.

Mr. Speaker, we're asking for this particular motion to be divided because in fact it has several distinct propositions. There's a precedent for this in the past. On February 27, 1995, when a former Provincial Treasurer divided an opposition motion moved by the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo into two parts, it was divided in mid-sentence because it contained two distinct propositions. The final decision on this lies with you, and I am certain that you will find that Motion 32 before us contains several distinct propositions.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, we'd like to recommend a process for dividing this motion up. There are some natural divisions within this motion which should be looked at separately, and I would ask you to consider dividing out the third paragraph, which says,

and, further, that pending such an amendment the Legislative Assembly of Alberta call upon the Prime Minister to summon to the Senate to fill vacancies relating to Alberta only those who are Senate nominees pursuant to the Senatorial Selection Act of Alberta,

from the other three as it deals with slightly different material than the other three clauses. We would ask that the other clauses be dealt with as one.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, pending a response from the chair with respect to this request, the chair is prepared to hear comments from other members with respect to its merit.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member across the way for his interest in this resolution, but the motion that is before the Assembly is one which deals with, in my view, one concept. It is a concept that has to have the three elements in it; that is, we have to be talking about an elected, equal, and effective Canadian Senate to have what our goal is, and that is a more effective Senate in Canada to represent the interests of Canadians and particularly the interests of the areas or regions of Canada and specifically the provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I think we're talking about one overall concept here, and I do not think that it is appropriate to try and take apart what is a well-understood concept and debate it in two or three or four pieces.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on this division proposal?

DR. PANNU: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, from a procedural point of view, anyone want to make an argument? A procedural argument? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: On the division of the motion?

THE SPEAKER: Yes.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, in the context of looking at this, the idea of support for the concept of the triple E Senate is unique. It stands fully in the context of a specific initiative that we can take. The next step, then, if that initiative becomes a reality, is: how do we go about the elections? In effect, if we tie the two parts, the support for the concept of the triple E Senate with an election which occurred in the past, we're basically tying the two of them to the idea that an election that has occurred in the past was relevant within the support for the triple E concept as approved and as requested today, and I think it would be appropriate to divide the two of them out.

Let's talk about the triple E Senate and then, secondly, let's talk about: was the previous election in the spirit of the support for that triple E concept? If it was, then, yes, the people who were elected in that can become the candidates for appointment or be sent to the Prime Minister asking that they be the people appointed. But, secondly, if we don't, what we can deal with then is a secondary debate about what is an appropriate way to carry on an election for that Senate. By tying the two of them together in one motion, I think it complicates the process of: do we support the concept of triple E and tie to it the previous process of elections, or should we be dealing with elections as a separate issue once we get the triple E concept approved?

That's, Mr. Speaker, why I think it would be very appropriate for us to handle them as separate debates and separate votes in this Legislature. Thank you for considering that.

THE SPEAKER: On the procedural point of the division, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. A citation would be helpful.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pardon me?

THE SPEAKER: A citation from parliamentary tradition would be helpful.

REV. ABBOTT: Well, just following up on the reasoning that was given by the member opposite, if you look at the motion, Mr. Speaker, it says here very clearly that it is a resolution to amend the Constitution of Canada. It's one issue, and all that the second, third, and fourth parts of the motion do is just explain how that amendment is going to take place. It seems very clear that this is just one issue, and I think that dividing it would actually cause it to be several issues. So I think that it would be best to leave it as it was presented by our hon. minister.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, *Beauchesne* very, very

clearly has a citation with respect to this dividing motion, section 557.

A motion which contains two or more distinct propositions may be divided so that the sense of the House may be taken on each separately. The Speaker has a discretionary power to decide whether a motion should be divided.

Section 557(2) states:

It is only in exceptional circumstances, and when there is little doubt, that the Speaker may intervene and, of his or her own initiative, amend the motion proposed by a Member.

Well, there's absolutely no intent from the chair to amend the motion.

The question of division is an interesting one. This is not the first time that this has occurred in this House. In fact, it occurred as recently as one year ago almost to the day, on November 21, 2001, when we had the debate on Standing Orders, if all hon. members will recall, that such a motion and such a suggestion was made to the Assembly. The conclusion at that time was that there would only be one debate with respect to the Standing Orders but that there would be a number of votes rather than one vote, and that seemed to work intelligently and quite capably with this.

In looking at the motion, it strikes at least the chair that it is not that complicated a motion. It may be a bit longer than most motions but, in terms of the overall intent, would not seem to require an intervention from the chair with respect to this matter. It would probably serve the debate well that, in fact, the four items are separate in sum, but others will argue that they're all together, and I don't think I can be motivated to intervene for a division with respect to this matter today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry does have the floor if he wishes to continue his participation.

Debate Continued

MR. BONNER: Yes. Thank you very much and thank you for that interpretation and ruling, Mr. Speaker. It is appreciated.

The debate over a triple E Senate has occurred on more than one occasion in this House, and the hon. minister has given us a bit of a history. When we look, we can see that when we follow a chronology of progress on the triple E Senate, in August of 1982 the government of Alberta released a discussion paper on Senate reform, and this was followed in March of 1985 by the Alberta Select Special Legislative Committee on Senate Reform recommending a triple E Senate. In May the report was unanimously approved by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. On March 10, 1987, the triple E Senate was once again unanimously approved by the Alberta Legislature, and I think that I would like to draw the point to all members' attention that it was unanimously approved by the Alberta Legislature.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

On July 2 and 3, 1987, the first ministers agreed to the Meech Lake accord, bringing Quebec into the Constitution and guaranteeing constitutional conferences on Senate reform. This was followed on September 9, 1987, by the special joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons recommending that first ministers pursue Senate reform on a priority basis. On May 18 to 21, 1988, the western Premiers unanimously endorsed the triple E Senate model. On August 17 to 19, 1988, all Premiers agreed that Alberta would lead discussions to promote triple E Senate reform.

3:40

From September 1988 to February 1989, led by the federal and intergovernmental affairs minister, Alberta's Senate Reform Task Force discussed Senate reform with the federal and all provincial governments. Also in February of 1989 the government of Alberta

introduced the Senatorial Selection Act. With this act Alberta would become the first province in Canadian history to select its Senators democratically.

Now, as well, without a doubt, one of the reasons we are discussing this particular motion today is the recent retirement of Senator Nick Taylor, who served this province very well not only as a Senator but as an MLA and as leader of the Liberal Party here in the Assembly. He moved in the Assembly on March 10, 1987:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly support an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to provide for an elected Senate, which would provide protection for the interests of the lesser populated regions through equal representation and through effective powers.

Again, we continue as the Official Opposition to support the motion that was moved by the then MLA back on March 10, 1987.

Now, then, this current Official Opposition supports Senate reform. We feel that there is a great need for Senate reform, and certainly if you were to poll Albertans, the majority would support some form of Senate reform, and those reforms vary as well, Mr. Speaker. Some Albertans feel that we shouldn't have any Senate, and certainly a number of others feel that Senators could be elected. Of course, in all of this there is due process. We continually come back to debating the merits of Senate reform here in the Legislature, yet we are not, it seems, moving forward to the point where we can get the other provinces onside to enough degree to get the feds to open up these discussions.

Now, then, as well, with an elected Senate we also have to consider that there are going to be some very worthy Senators who would not have on their own merits the resources to be elected to a triple E Senate. One Senator that I had this discussion with was Senator Thelma Chalifoux, certainly an outstanding Senator, a Senator who represents all Albertans but, as well, a minority group here in Alberta and has done a marvelous job. I think of the political climate when Senator Doug Roche was appointed, certainly a man whose credentials are unquestionable in this province and a man who represents Albertans as a Senator and does a marvelous job and a person that I am proud to say is one of our Senators.

We do have to look at the possibility that in an elected Senate we're not going to get everything we want, but two of the key things that I support in Senate reform is that with an elected Senate we would have representation that would reflect the views of Albertans and accommodate the needs of all Canadians. I think, Mr. Speaker, that would certainly be one of the areas that we would look at as being a better system than the current appointed system that is happening.

If we do have a triple E Senate, an elected Senate with equal representation from each particular province, then the principle of equality of all provinces in a federal state will take place, so it certainly will balance off the differences in population that we do have across this country. As well, if we do have Senate reform and a triple E Senate and we do send Senators from this province that are duly elected, then what we must also ensure in this reform is that there are effective powers in the Senate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that it's been the Official Opposition's position for many years here in the Assembly that we support a triple E Senate with elected Senators, and I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, followed by Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am absolutely thrilled to be able to talk about the triple E Senate and why we need

one. This is something that has been a big part of my life for a very long time. Back in the early 1980s – and I was a little bit younger then than I am today – the federal government came along with a program called the national energy program, and it decimated a lot of this province. It devastated the town that I was living in, which was a very small city called Airdrie, at that point around 6,000 people, and within months we had over 500 empty homes as people packed up and moved out of our city and out of our province and went home because so much of our industry was being shut down.

While it's true that there was, in fact, a global recession that was starting, it was a thousand times worse here than it ever needed to be because of government intervention in the economy, and the government was, in fact, the federal government. I couldn't understand then and I don't understand today why a federal government would in fact hurt any of the parts of a country. It didn't make any sense. At the same time, there was an election going on up in Olds-Didsbury, where a separatist won, and our options at that time, as I saw them, 20 years ago, were whether or not it matters being part of this country, and if it does, in fact, what do you do about it? One of the things that mattered to me, I thought: well, nobody wants to give up on a country, so let's talk about a triple E Senate.

I met Mr. Bert Brown, who's now one of the Senators-elect, and have since also had the opportunity to meet Mr. Ted Morton, both really interesting men who believe that if you're going to be part of this country, you've got to be treated equally, and the only way you can do that is, in fact, if you have an elected, an equal, and an effective Senate.

As I watched going through the '80s and as I watch today as we're talking about things like Kyoto, I see the similarities, and they're absolutely staggering. Twenty years have gone by since the first attempts at trying to bring a triple E Senate to this country, and in that 20 years we've suffered inside this province. We've had all kinds of issues with the federal government, and the federal government chooses not to listen, and our one salvation, from my perspective, is a Senate that is, in fact, equal, elected, and effective for all of this country, not just for Alberta but not just for Ontario and not just for Quebec.

3:50

Well, why does it matter? It matters because this year alone, for example, Alberta will pay over \$9 billion more into Confederation than it gets back out, and we have at the same time an inequity in tax bases for corporations in this country, where it's okay to say to the energy industry: you can pay 28 percent. Every other industry can pay 21 percent, but the energy industry is based largely in Alberta, so that's okay. It's not okay. It wouldn't be okay if it were in Nova Scotia. It wouldn't be okay if it were in Newfoundland, and it's not okay just because it's here. It's not okay that we have a Canadian Wheat Board that the east doesn't have to deal with but we have had imposed on us for over 50 years, and you can't even have a conversation about it. It's not okay that you have gun control laws that make no sense at all, where you spend \$800 million registering guns. Nobody even knows how many guns are registered or how many aren't. My own mother tried to register a gun, spent three years, has had at least 15 phone calls with people in Ottawa trying to straighten out a gun that hasn't been fired in 60 years, but, hey, she's clearly a risk to this country. We just do things, and there's no logic to it. My logic, my basis is that without a triple E there's really little point in trying to defend an Alberta inside this country.

You know, one of my colleagues has a republic of Alberta hat. I don't have the hat, but I'm looking for one. I'm very, very proud of my province, and I'm very, very proud of my heritage. I'm also incredibly proud of the fact that when the oil patch needed invest-

ments in the '40s and the '50s and the '60s and the '70s – most of Canada couldn't be bothered – the money came here from the United States. They believed in our oil patch. They helped us develop it. They turned us into a have province from a have-not province, and we've been punished ever since, and I'm frankly tired of it. My hope is that a triple E Senate at least could give us an opportunity to have an equal, effective, and elected voice in the government of this country.

A few years ago in the Senate in the United States, on a vote of 95 to 0 – five people were away – because they have an elected and an equal and an effective Senate in the United States, 95 people voted against the Kyoto protocol. It never even made it to Congress. It didn't need to. The Senate killed it, and they killed it because it wasn't fair to all regions of their country, a concept apparently alien to our federal government: you don't need to hose down one part of your country so that another part can do what? So we can look good on an international stage? We produce 2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. We heat an entire country, a cold country. We sell clean-burning oil and gas to the United States. We have the cleanest coal in the world here, but we have to feel guilty about everything, and I'm tired of feeling guilty. I want some equality, and I want it now.

When I look back at what was happening 20 years ago, a little snapshot of history, newspaper clippings pulled out of the Legislature Library – okay? – in 1981 Jean Chretien told a packed audience of school trustees: the wealth of the country must be shared if there is to be equal opportunity across Canada. Well, the Prime Minister was in Alberta about a year ago and made the same comment. Nothing changes. The script probably got retyped, but it's the same script. At the same time, in 1981, the federal government came up with a \$3.25 million advertising campaign to promote the national energy program and tell everybody that it was a good thing and it won't hurt a bit, so just let it go; go for it, guys. Canada's oil policy, a real-life nightmare. Just one more time with feeling. Twenty years later we've now got some of our key tar sands projects being put on hold and being reconsidered while everybody tries to figure out what Kyoto will really do to us. More of the same: the NEP, Jean Chretien. Yes, it is. It's more of the same. It's 20 years later. It's *deja vu* all over again.

Then because they killed the oil industry, they came up with something they called PIP grants, nice little tax incentives, so that, you know, you could back in to other people's oil wells, but hey, that was okay because it was the Canadian way. Right? They spent \$6.5 billion buying Petro-Canada, but that was okay too, because the money was coming out of Alberta because they had a two-price system for our oil. Life was good. What was not to like? People in the east could get our oil and gas at less than world price. That was okay because it was Alberta. Well, it's not okay. It wasn't okay then, and it's not okay now.

Jean Chretien made the comment: as a national government we have preoccupations of a different nature than Alberta; it is a matter of finding an acceptable formula. There was no formula. It was the raping of our province. That was a formula that worked. It sold for them. It worked really good. Thank God that Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservatives got elected and managed after six years of destruction in our province to repeal the national energy program and give us a break.

You know, just one example is 13,000 people laid off in one week in Canada. "Energy ad Campaign Defended by Lalonde," because he had to defend it. Alberta's economy was battered, but that was okay.

"Gray Told NEP Caused Steel Layoffs," but they didn't react because that was okay. They were out here too. They were mostly

in Saskatchewan, where IPSCO was working at the time.

"Little Hope for Canada's Work-seeking Youth." Yeah. What about our kids? What about their future? You know, where does that fit? Maybe the triple E gives them some hope for a future where they're part of a country and they're an equal partner in that country. I don't think it should be asking too much.

"Oilpatch Frowns on 'Son of NEP,'" because the NEP was so bad, they finally, after several years, decided to design it again, and it was called Son of NEP. No doubt after Son of Sam, a serial killer in the United States.

The Auditor General came out in 1981 or '83 and said that he's right. The minister said that we're at close to collapse. Our country's economy was close to collapse. And now we want to do it again? Why? So our Prime Minister can look good on an international stage? I don't need him to look good out there. I need him to do his job here.

"GNP Falls by 2%." How much will it fall this time as we go through this? Ottawa treats our economy like an enemy target, and here we are all being told again: "Don't be hysterical. There's nothing really bad going to happen here. Just get over it, Alberta, and play ball." I don't want to play, Mr. Speaker.

Mortgages were up to 20 percent at that time. Is that our next little thing that's going to come? We're going to move from the low interest rates to high interest rates as we try and back up our 63-cent dollar again. They were trying to back it up to 81 cents then. Almost destroyed us.

"The Economy in a Nutshell – Liberal Tomfoolery." It's an interesting comment.

We live in a country which has been blessed above all others . . .

We live in a garden that can feed half the world. We have mineral riches beyond measure . . . We are one of the few industrial nations with the capacity for self-sufficiency in petroleum supplies . . . Our people are resilient, hardworking and resourceful. But we have one fatal flaw. We like to elect governments which dream up contradictory, ill-conceived, paradoxical policies.

And we've got another one that's doing the same thing. It's not really another one. It's pretty much the same guys. They're still there. It's 20 years later, and they're still doing it.

"Emergency Debate Sought over Economic Crisis." They finally admitted we were in a crisis, and that was just before their government fell. Thank you, God.

"Shell, Gulf Blaming NEP for Sharp Drop in Earnings." Yeah, I'll bet they were.

"Once a Great Nation of Producers and Entrepreneurs," by Jim Gray. That's one of the most incredible articles I've ever read – and it was done in 1982 – talking about what's wrong with a government that takes away the incentive from hardworking Albertans to want to do what we do best, which is produce riches in this province that feed the rest of our nation.

When we look at our country, it is indeed a wonderful country. I've been in parts of this country. I'd like to keep it together, Mr. Speaker, but we can't do it without a triple E.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I'd refer hon. members to Standing Order 29(2)(a). It may cause further debate.

The hon. member.

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For many in this Chamber the opportunity to speak to the Senate, particularly the triple E Senate motion, is something that I think is treasured, because it's something that many of us have worked towards for many, many years. As we all know, in order to achieve anything in life, but particularly anything politically, there is one

absolutely necessary ingredient, and that is unwavering resolve. If we are ever going to achieve a political end, we will achieve it because we have given it our best and we have given it unwavering resolve. There is one person in our province to whom that description, unwavering resolve, most closely fits as it relates to Senate reform, and that person is Mr. Bert Brown. We welcome Mr. Brown in the Speaker's gallery today.

4:00

Now, the triple E Senate has over the years taken on a political majesty that it may or may not be able to deliver on, but the notion of a triple E Senate represents the capacity of our country to deal fairly with its disparate parts. The notion that we had to do something, that we had to treat all of the regions and the provinces in Canada fairly came to a head, as was earlier mentioned by the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View – at least it came to a head in my consciousness – in relation to the national energy program, to the CF-18 maintenance contract, to the many examples of political favouritism that protected the rich resource base of votes of the federal Liberal Party and the federal Conservative Party. Both seemed to some of us to be different sides of the same coin. Both, in order to get elected, had to pander to that part of the country which was rich in votes. You fish where the fish are, and that's what they did.

The resentment here in western Canada was palpable, and there were many expressions of that resentment at that time, some of them in separation and others in more a positive vein: the notion of a triple E Senate. Mr. Brown, I recall, sold those little triple E pins that people would wear, and gradually there was a groundswell of interest and support for the notion of a triple E Senate. It was something that was so far beyond the pale that it was impossible to achieve, but unwavering resolution brought it to the point where a senatorial election was held in Alberta.

Now, it was held in Alberta after the Meech Lake accord, which really had the intent and the purpose to redefine and to put substance around Quebec's place in Canada. The Meech Lake accord was essentially to give comfort to Quebec, to ameliorate some of the separatist tendencies in Quebec. Meech Lake also gave a nod to the reform of the Senate, and it was the first time, to my knowledge, that the federal government actually gave an important nod to the notion that in order to appease Quebec and in order to speak to the security of the people of Quebec within Canada, some thought should also be given to the west.

Meech Lake was not successful. It was a roll of the dice that didn't turn out the way it was expected to. That was to some a tragedy, to others a blessing. It fell apart because of Elijah Harper, a member of the Legislature of Manitoba who had not been brought onside and who in the waning hours of the debate, as members will recall, declined to give his unanimous consent, and the Meech Lake accord did not go further.

Eventually that led to the Charlottetown accord, which did not find support across the country at all towards the end of the debate, and for some people that also was a tragedy. But the Charlottetown accord did give the country the potential of a two and a half E Senate. It did change some of the responsibilities, some of the powers of the Senate. It gave us an elected and effective, to a lesser degree than the current Senate, and not quite an equal Senate.

The Meech Lake accord failed, and the notion of Senate reform was doomed for some time in part because Canadians just didn't want to talk about constitutional things. We had much bigger fish to fry, namely our economy, and that had to be addressed. There was no passion whatsoever.

Then, of course, in 1995 the Quebec referendum came within a

hair of being lost by Canada and won by Quebec, and that caused the Prime Minister in reaction to the referendum in Quebec to bring to the House of Commons a resolution that would define Quebec's place as a unique society in Canada. That resolution went through the House of Commons. It was a nod to Quebec. It really, other than the psychological impact, was rather meaningless.

The most meaningful constitutional gathering that took place in that time, though, was the Calgary framework and the declaration of the Premiers in Calgary. How soon we forget. That was only five years or so ago. If I may read the seventh point from the seven in the Calgary declaration:

Canada is a federal system where federal, provincial, and territorial governments work in partnership while respecting each others' jurisdictions. Canadians want their governments to work cooperatively and with flexibility to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the federation. Canadians want their governments to work together particularly in the delivery of their social programs. Provinces and territories renew their commitment to work in partnership with the Government of Canada to best serve the needs of Canadians.

Now, does that sound like the federal government's position and the current Prime Minister's position as regards the Kyoto protocol? I don't think so. The arrogance displayed by the Prime Minister, represented by the power vested in the office of the Prime Minister with absolutely no checks and balances, is what has led to the renewal of interest in reform of the Senate and the triple E Senate in Alberta. If we as federalist Canadians are not able to give substance to the sense that people in Alberta and in other regions of the country do not have a place in the country that is on par with the power of the votes of Ontario and Quebec, then there will develop a schism in our country beyond anything that the federal government has ever experienced in regard to Quebec.

What we're talking about in this motion is, in my opinion, exceptionally important in the historical affairs of our country because, as the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View indicated, there are many of us here in our province who are proud Canadians but will not go through another national energy program. So if the federal government is paying any heed whatsoever to the debate that takes place in this Chamber, in this Legislature, they will see behind the motion the reason that exists here in Alberta and is reflected not just here but in other provinces.

Now, we may or we may not end up at the end of the day with a triple E Senate. There exists in Canada today the understanding that Canada is regional in nature – Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, the prairies, and British Columbia – and that these are natural, geographic, and interest groupings. It may come to pass that we will get "elected" and that we will get, by nature of being elected with the powers existent, "effective," and we may end up with "equitable" rather than "equal." The important thing is that these negotiations take place in the interests of our country and of our province. The important thing is that our Premier show the same unwavering resolution when it comes to the negotiations with the other Premiers and the government of Canada that Mr. Brown has shown over these many years, because it is unwavering resolution that will see this through to the end.

4:10

Nothing that I have said should be construed as in any way denigrating the quality of the people that are in the Senate. There are some exceptionally fine people and there are some exceptionally fine people representing Alberta in the Senate today. It's interesting to note, however, that after Alberta had the senatorial election and Alberta had two Senators-in-waiting, the Senators appointed to represent Alberta were of a much higher calibre, in my opinion, than had previously been considered.

Having said that, Alberta's place in Confederation is up for grabs. Make no mistake about it: if we are not able to find our place in Confederation with honour, if we are not able to have representation in the Parliament of Canada that balances the power of the office of the Prime Minister to give voice to the important perspectives of the provinces, including ours, Canada is going to be in for a very difficult constitutional time once again. And none of us want that.

So I would urge this Legislature, other Legislatures, and the Parliament of Canada, first of all, to understand this motion as a warning shot across the brow, to take the Kyoto ratification process off the Order Paper, to consult with the provinces as was promised in the Calgary declaration, and then to work with the Premiers and urge our Premier to show the same unwavering resolution that Mr. Brown has shown over these many years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was with interest that I listened to the comments of the members who have just spoken on this matter. It may surprise some hon. members to know that the New Democratic Party in Canada was a pioneer of Senate reform. Long before the triple E Senate reared its head, our party, going back to the early 1960s, was calling for the abolition of the unelected Senate of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I sometimes agree with some hon. members' sentiments, and one that I've heard often in this Chamber is that we are overgoverned in this country. I certainly believe that an additional layer of politicians at the national level needs to be examined quite closely: the impact of that, what it is supposed to achieve. In this case what it is supposed to achieve is the prevention of things like the national energy plan ever happening again, according to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. It may, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford says, be – and I'm paraphrasing – a little bit oversold. It may in fact not deliver what is expected of it. Those expectations, based on what the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View had to say, are very, very high indeed.

What we are going to have, I think, is a more complex federal system. It may be more representative. It may give more power to the provinces, but it will in fact present, I think, a number of constitutional challenges and costs, and I think that there are other avenues that could be followed in order to improve the functioning of the government in this country.

I believe, having been here now for a little bit over two years, that there is a major reform of democracy which is required right here and, indeed, in the federal parliament and probably in many, if not most, of the provincial legislatures right across the country. I think we should look at that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about the democratic deficit this afternoon, and I believe that that is, in fact, a serious problem. So we ought to look at these issues, I think, as a package rather than single out one silver bullet that we believe is going to solve all the problems in the country.

If you look at some of the issues that have been mentioned – for example, the power of the Prime Minister's office is mirrored in this place in the power of the Premier's office. The attempts of the Liberal backbenchers to get more power have been faintly mirrored in this place and I think need to be a lot stronger. There are some things that are apparent here where we lag behind even what has happened in the Parliament of Canada. We had the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs talk about the wonderful step that had been taken in Ottawa by the backbenchers in extending their power to elect chairs of committees, yet overwhelmingly the government

members voted down the attempt to bring the same thing here.

We don't have all-party standing committees in Alberta, and they do in the Parliament of Canada. What we have here is all-government committees that masquerade as parliamentary committees, and we saw evidence of that in the point of order that was made today. The government likes to pretend, when it's convenient, that these single-party committees, these government committees, are actually somehow part of this Legislature's processes, and they're not. They may be part of the government's processes, but they are absolutely not a part of the process of this Assembly. I think it's time that the members came clean with Albertans on that whole question because we have a system here where the role of the government and the role of the Assembly have become blurred, the role of the Progressive Conservative Party and the role of the government have become even more blurred, and the role of business and the role of government has also become blurred. The democratic deficit is probably highest right here in Alberta.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the other aspects of democracy, if we are really interested in improving democracy federally, that we could talk about here in Alberta. The most serious one is the first-past-the-post system, where individual constituencies elect by plurality the representatives of this Assembly, and it distorts the will of the people. It distorts the will of the people in Ottawa, and it distorts the will of the people in this Assembly. There is no way that the percentage of Conservative MLAs in this Assembly matches the number of people who voted for the Conservatives in the last election. They would have won the election – and I'm quite prepared to admit it – but I'll tell you, not in the numbers that are represented here. So the will of the people of Alberta has been distorted.

REV. ABBOTT: Point of order.

4:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of Order. A citation, please.

Point of Order Relevance

REV. ABBOTT: *Beauchesne* 459, relevance and repetition difficult to assess and enforce. Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a government motion to amend the Constitution of Canada, and the member opposite there is talking about some provincial election history that has nothing to do with the motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All on the matter of relevance, hon. member.

MR. MASON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I view the point of order as simply a tactic of harassment. I'm clearly speaking against the amendment, and I'm giving my reasons. The main reason is that there are real democratic priorities that we ought to be addressing right here in Alberta. I trust my clock will be stopped during this time.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Any further discussion on this?

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has risen on a point of order citing 459, Relevance and Repetition. As the hon. member has indicated, relevance is not easy to define. In borderline cases the member should be given the benefit of the doubt, although the Speaker has frequently admonished members who have strayed in debate.

One would think that there is some relevance if we are talking about making parliamentary institutions more democratic, that you

might make, albeit some people may think erroneous, other references to what they deem as undemocratic or a democratic deficit. As I say, the hon. member may not agree with the relationship, but it's perfectly within the hon. member's right to suggest that that is relevant.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Debate Continued

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that. I want to indicate that I think that the first-past-the-post system has distorted the will of the people of Canada as represented in the parliament of Canada and that if it was replaced with a proportional representation system, there would be much broader views expressed and you would not have the one-party dominance in Ontario that gives the Liberal government an almost unlimited lease on power. So there are other ways to deal with it, and that's my point on this matter.

I want to say something about the Senate election that took place, that the other parties, aside from the Reform and Conservative parties, did not contest the election, in fact challenged the legitimacy of it. Municipalities challenged the government's high-handedness in forcing them to take this on at their cost. There was a high proportion of spoiled ballots, and the results, frankly, Mr. Speaker, are far too stale for us to urge the federal government to appoint these people. This is a stunt, and it is not a legitimate constitutional action in any way.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment, if I may, to this, and I will wait for this to be distributed. Do I need to read it now, Mr. Speaker?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You may read it, and then we'll wait till everyone has a copy.

MR. MASON: Before reading it?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: No. You may read it unless it's 20 pages long. If it's short, read it. Then people will have the sense of it, and then it's going to be delivered to the table and hopefully the original is going to be given to the table. The original copy of the amendment must be presented to the table as well as four other copies.

MR. MASON: Yes. The original copy is on the front. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will move that Government Motion 32 be amended as follows: in the first paragraph by striking out "to provide for an elected Senate which would represent the interests of all provinces through equal representation and through effective powers" and substituting therefore "to abolish the Senate," and by striking out everything after "consultations with all provincial governments on this amendment." This has been approved by the Parliamentary Counsel.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on amendment A1.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. How much time am I allowed on this amendment?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, you're allowed in the whole motion, including your amendment, 15 minutes, following which there can be five minutes of questions. Then we go on to the next speaker, but it would have to be on the amendment.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The amendment would change the government motion so that we were in support of the abolition of the Senate.

Now, you've got to go back to the history of the Senate in Canada. It did not have the same history as the United States. People would like to institute or impose American political institutions into Canada, but they don't necessarily fit. If you examine the early history of Canada and the development of its institutions, the Senate was intended to represent the House of Lords in the British system. There was a very high, for the time, property requirement, and they deliberately made it of a nature that only wealthy people could be members, attempting, without the history of the autocracy in Canada that existed in England – the lords and nobles and dukes and all of those kinds of people – to create that here in Canada. So it was not elected on purpose.

It has always been, in our view, a bastion of anti-democratic views. It has never been publicly accountable, and it is appointed by the Prime Minister. All provincial assemblies that had a bicameral system have abolished their upper Chamber. The last to do so was the province of Quebec, and I think it was in 1967 or 1968 that they abolished the last upper Chamber, appointed in a similar fashion by the Premier of Quebec as the Senate of Canada is. It's obvious to me that the Senate of Canada has never been consistent with a democratically elected system.

Now, people want to take the step of making it elected and making it democratic, and that's fine. As I've said earlier, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that that is the solution to Canada's constitutional problems. I think there are many other things that we could do to reinvigorate our democracy in Canada and in Alberta.

The Senate has seen any number of scandals of people not attending. As we know, they had to actually go down and virtually drag a guy out of Mexico in order to get him to attend to even the slightest amount of his duties. The Senate does not contribute in a meaningful way, in my view, in the view of my party, to the political life of this country. It is a place of patronage writ large, the perfect place for various bagmen and party workers and people to whom the government owes favours to be appointed. One or two occasionally are actually appointed on their merits, and in some of those cases we actually have some of the very finest people involved in government across the country, and I would like to say that some of the recent appointments of Senators in Alberta have fallen into that category. Some members may not agree.

So, Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, my amendment would serve the function of putting this Assembly on the record as calling for the abolition of the upper House in Canada so that we would have a system of government that was democratically elected, and we could start on the step of extending democracy in Ottawa and in Edmonton, and I think that that's where we should go.

Thank you.

4:30

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has already spoken on this. I presume that by standing you're going to ask a question or a comment.

MR. McCLELLAND: It's not on the amendment but on questions and comments.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, and the table has reminded me that you may also speak again on the amendment at a later time.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is in the nature of Standing Order 29, questions and comments. I'd like to ask the

hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands: given the federal nature of our country and the constitutional nature of the provinces and of our constitutional relationship with the federal government, in the absence of a second Chamber, the Senate, how would the regions and the provinces offset the weight of the representation-by-population of vote-rich Toronto and Montreal, and how could there be any potential effective balance in the relationship between the provinces represented by the Senate and the power of the office of the Prime Minister?

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

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has touched on some important things. First of all, the weight of the members of Ontario would be reduced by a proportional representation system, so there would be more diversity amongst the Members of Parliament from across Canada and from central Canada. I think that the Constitution clearly provides strong protections for the provinces, and I don't think that we need a Senate to represent the provinces. This province is perfectly capable of representing itself. I think there are some other developments and evolutions that could take place in terms of provincial and federal conferences, as we used to see when Mr. Trudeau was the Prime Minister. So basically I'm of the view that we simply do not need a triple E Senate to protect our rights.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, if there are no other members.

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, thank you very much. Proportional representation requires a list. The list is put together by the leader of the political party. If the Prime Minister puts together the list and those on the list are there at the pleasure of being put on the list by the Prime Minister, would that not further concentrate power in the hands of the Prime Minister and further complicate and further denigrate the very democracy that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands wants to achieve?

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

MR. MASON: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. I certainly can't speak for the Liberal Party of Canada, nor would I try, but certainly I know that within our party, and I'm sure if we had a system within yours federally, there would be a democratic decision that would be made with respect to the list. It's not just the leader that assigns the list in places where we have this kind of system. There are only about three democracies left that have the system that we have. I think Australia, Britain, the United States, and Canada are pretty much it in terms of these ridings rather than proportional representation.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't going to speak to this amendment, but I feel rather compelled to, if I might speak against it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. I think, unless the clock has run out, that we're on comments and questions on the last speaker.

MRS. NELSON: Oh, then may I make a clarification through a question?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Yes.

MRS. NELSON: Back in the original discussion the hon. member made the comment that we didn't have standing committees out here in this province like they have in other parliaments, and actually he sits on two select standing committees of this very Legislature. I was wondering: was he referring to reducing those standing committees in our Legislature and giving up his membership on them?

The second thing I was wondering. I appreciate his frustration level that there must be with not having the Senate effectively representing the province of Alberta, but I fail to understand as to why he would like to move away from a system that would have, clearly, representation from all sectors of this country in Ottawa so we could be dealt with fairly through an equal representation, as opposed to being gobbled up again by central Canada, which is the proposal he's putting forward.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question is rhetorical. The first one . . . [Mr. Mason's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The tyranny of the clock. The time for comments and questions and answers to either the comments or questions is up for this particular speech. We're on the amendment. I have two people who have indicated that they wish to speak to it.

Hon. Member for Wainwright, were you wishing to speak on the main motion itself or on the amendment?

MR. GRIFFITHS: The main motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The main motion.

The hon. minister expressed an interest in speaking on the amendment. The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to speak against this amendment, and I have to assume that this was put forward out of total frustration. I'm going to go back a little bit in time. Back in 1981, when the patriation of the Constitution was taking place – Mr. Bert Brown, who's in your gallery, will remember this – I was one of the fortunate people that belonged to a group called the Canadian citizens' Constitution committee. We were concerned about the representation across Canada and the different acts of the provinces that joined Confederation and what the changes would be in the Canadian Constitution, particularly with the introduction of things such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We traveled across Canada and talked to over a million people, in fact collected signatures to stop the move by our federal government. We went through the British parliamentary system and actually met up with 60 Lords from the House of Lords in England to plead the case to stop the patriation because of the unfairness that there would be with the democratic principles that we had in Confederation originally, that they were not going to be represented within the Constitution that was being put forward because, clearly, there was a difference and a determination to have a dominance in central Canada of the whole country.

Well, we presented a million signatures to the House of Commons in Canada. Of course, they were totally ignored, and so we went to England. We met with the Prime Minister and with the House of Lords, and they were supportive. Sixty Lords in the House of Lords were onside with what we were trying to put forward so that there would be fairness within Canada. Because of the vast size of this

country we don't have the population base in western Canada to effectively be represented in Ottawa. The bicameral system seemed to be the only alternative that we could have, similar to what they had in the United States. They experienced the same vastness of their country, but they had a difference between population bases throughout the land.

Having an equal representation in the Senate, having the Senate elected, and having the Senate actually have effective powers became critically important. We lost the case in our presentation, obviously, because we ended up with not only not having sort of an effective situation within the Constitution but also having the Charter of Rights and Freedoms tacked on, which really becomes a contradiction to democracy because it protects people against the willful destruction of the majority, which is a democratic process, and we were in contradiction.

[The Speaker in the chair]

So I hope that when we look at trying to have a say in what happens within a family and through the Senate, it is not going to be rejected by the hon. member, because I think it's a mistake. Clearly, we recognize that we don't have the population base in western Canada to have equal representation in the House of Commons, but the Senate is supposed to be the sober second thought. It's supposed to be made up of the minds that would look clearly at a certain level of the bill, at third reading of the bill, and make a determination if this is in the best interests of the country. That can only be accomplished if you have equal representation. That can only be accomplished if there's an effective process for it to be followed, and, clearly, as we have enunciated here in Alberta, the people should be chosen by the people.

4:40

So to throw that all out, to me, would be the last straw. I don't feel that we should give up on triple E. I think it's the only salvation that we have in parts of Canada outside of Ontario and Quebec because we're not going to have the population base, but clearly we want to be part of the program. Clearly, we want to be part of Canada. We've said that time and time again, but it's getting very difficult when we don't feel that we have any representation in Ottawa.

We went through a process in Alberta a few years back where we actually elected Senate candidates, and we said: we want these people to represent us in the Senate. The people of Alberta voted. They selected their candidates. The arrogance of the federal Liberal Party to ignore that process has been outrageous. It's unconscionable. We're used to it out here, but we need to fight to have fairness. We need to fight to have representation. We need to be treated equally. In all other aspects we're asked to contribute, to be a partner, and Alberta contributes immensely to Confederation, and we're prepared and we want to do that. We want to be part of the family, but that can't be a one-way street. We have to have the opportunity to be there.

So I would hope that you won't give up on having that say, because I think that would be a big mistake. I think the effective use of a bicameral system in the United States has been very successful for smaller states, for smaller jurisdictions. Their congress, of course, is rep-by-pop, but the bicameral system in the House has two Senators from each state. It's been very effective. It's a process I don't know why we're fearful of in Canada. We'd still have the House of Commons. I don't know why we're so frightened of it, unless it's like my colleague from Airdrie-Rocky View mentioned earlier: we might actually be heard. We might actually be heard in

Ottawa. It would be a novel concept to ever have it happen.

So when we look at this, Mr. Speaker, I hope that all members who clearly vote against this motion to abolish the Senate – I don't think that that's in the best interests of Albertans, and it's certainly not in the best interests of Canadians. We need to have a vehicle to be heard, but we need it to be fair. We need it to be a triple E: elected, effective, and equal. All we're asking for is to go back to that so that every part of this country can truly have a voice and be heard in Ottawa. What can be so tough about that? Surely nothing.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: First of all, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I do believe Standing Order 20 would preclude you from participating again.

MR. MASON: I have questions.

THE SPEAKER: You want to go to questions or comments? Okay. That's perfectly fine.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. minister: I appreciate your speech and relatively moderate tone and the appeal. I appreciate it, but I want to ask a question. The Senate elections that took place in Alberta I believe are nearly four years old. Had those Senators been appointed immediately thereafter, their terms would now be coming to an end. How long is that election going to be valid, in your view? How long do you believe that election that took place nearly four years ago will entitle the individuals who, quote, won it to be Alberta Senators-in-waiting, and when will the government hold a new election so we can ascertain the will of the people at this point?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the premise was that if Albertans selected their candidates, they would be appointed to the Senate. The difficulty is that that was totally ignored by the federal government, and I believe, quite frankly, that Albertans are still waiting for the Senate candidates who have been elected as candidates to be recognized by the federal government. Again, this is not hard. Albertans duly elected these people at the polls, and I think they should be recognized by the federal government. That's the bare minimum, and we'll perpetuate the fight until they are appointed in the Senate. I think that's a process that Albertans would want us to stick to, so I would hope that they would agree to continue on.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the question-and-answer section, please.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. minister in regard to her remarks pertaining to the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. The hon. minister spoke about the arrogance of the federal government in their refusal to accept the choice that was made by Albertans in regard to the two individuals who were selected to be on the waiting list for Senators. If that's fair enough and there's an arrogant pattern by the federal government, what happened to communities in Alberta that voted to get rid of VLTs? What did this provincial government do in relation to that, if the federal government is arrogant in their refusal to deal with the Senate elections?

MRS. NELSON: Well, I don't know where the hon. member has been. I would normally say "hello?" at this point. But if you've forgotten, there have been court cases that have been ongoing on that

very issue. So, you know, there's a process through the judiciary that is taking place as we speak on those cases. We would be negligent if we jumped in and interfered in that and dialogued on that in this House. We would not do that because they're before the courts now.

We're talking about a Senate election.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, still in the question-and-answer section.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. minister: does the hon. minister consider it fair to force Alberta communities that make a democratic choice to go through the courts?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I always understood – and I'm not a lawyer – that the courts were available to all and that if people chose to challenge things, they had the right to go to court. But I would probably ask the Minister of Gaming to comment on that.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you. I may comment under Standing Order 29. The facts behind this situation simply are that this Legislature passed legislation to put into effect the plebiscite results in those communities. That was challenged, and as a result the matter is before the courts. My understanding is that this Legislature has fulfilled its role, and the courts are fulfilling their role pursuant to the right of individual Canadians to make challenges with respect to legislation and to raise constitutional issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. There are 16 seconds left in this section.

MR. MASON: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: On a point of order?

MR. MASON: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we'll just wait 10 seconds and see if there's an additional question in the comment section.

Okay. We'll now recognize the point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just looking for the citation here. I believe it's 29(2), that says:

A period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses.

I believe that this applies to questions and answers of the person who just spoke, and I guess I would ask for a ruling on whether or not it can be referred to someone else.

4:50

THE SPEAKER: Well, the chair has been listening very attentively to this debate this afternoon, even in his office because of the technology we have. It seems to me that not too many minutes ago there was a question of relevance raised in the House when the Deputy Speaker was in the chair, and the Deputy Speaker responded that to the greatest degree the widest range would be applied this afternoon with respect to this debate.

It is absolutely correct, hon. member, that the chair might have intervened when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raised his question. The chair thought for a moment that there was a major

disconnect here between the two subjects that were being raised but, in terms of bending over backwards to accommodate the wishes of all hon. members to have the widest range of opportunity by way of example, allowed it to proceed. Of course, presumably, then, those who would respond to the question should have a similar kind of thing now.

So the question specifically was: would it have been appropriate for the hon. Minister of Finance to actually ask and for her response to have been supplemented in this case by the hon. Minister of Gaming? It seemed to me that in listening attentively to the question, with the need for complete accuracy in the response, the minister who might most appropriately provide the most important information in this case would have been the Minister of Gaming. So it's only in terms of the pursuit of knowledge for all members that the chair allowed that to proceed.

I take it that this point of order has now been concluded and we are simply on the amendment to the motion and there are additional members who would like to participate on the amendment.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment is an attempt to fix what we see as a fatal flaw in the motion before this House. Therefore, it's very difficult to speak to the amendment without speaking to the flawed nature of the motion itself. So with your permission I would like to proceed to make a few comments.

This motion, which is being amended by way of the amendment that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands has put before the House, really has a certain context and background. The question was raised earlier: for how long does this election of Senators remain valid? It took place in conjunction with the municipal elections in 1998. Those municipal elections have since happened again. Albertans have the right to ask the question of whether or not the Senate election should follow the same cycle, and those who want to represent Alberta through election should have run again at the last municipal election, with a question as to the validity of the election that took place in '98. In November of 2002 we are over four years since that election took place, so there are serious questions about whether or not what we're talking about really should be valid.

This raises the question: shouldn't there be a statute of limitation on Senators-in-waiting? This motion before us, which will be amended, hopefully, by this House in the remaining 20 minutes or so of the time that's available to the House, is silent on it. I think it needs to address that issue. If we're serious about democracy and we don't want to make a mockery of it, then these serious issues should be addressed. Albertans have a right; they are entitled to ask if there is a limitation on the Senators-in-waiting. Otherwise, we are simply ignoring an issue which lies at the very heart of the whole process of democratization and the argument made to make a triple E Senate, which is presumably a step towards a more democratic federal government arrangement. So the issue of whether or not there should be a statute of limitation is something that should be addressed in the motion. Since it's not, I think the amendment made by my colleague is something that should be seriously considered and that will allow some discussion on this.

Another issue, Mr. Speaker: Senators get to serve until age 75. As such is the case, since there's no statute of limitation on this particular situation in Alberta, does this mean that one gets to be a Senator-in-waiting until one turns 75? Another vital question that bears both on the motion and the amendment to it.

Moreover, there are serious questions as to the meaningfulness of this so-called Senate election. Let me make some arguments there. First of all, there was only one political party, the former Reform Party, that fielded candidates. The provincial Conservatives, those

great champions of the elected Senate, failed to field a candidate of their own. There is a certain mentality here that one party is all you need to run a government. That used to be the case in some other places. I hope it doesn't come to be the case here.

AN HON. MEMBER: Name some of those places, Raj.

DR. PANNU: I would like to name names here, Mr. Speaker, but it's the case that one-party states run one candidate per constituency. There are no contests. I mean, here we don't walk into a situation, which becomes a matter of routine, where if there is only one party running candidates for election, we should celebrate that fact and stick to the results of that kind of phony election. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, may I proceed?

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, I was going to interject at this point to in fact remind hon. members that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona does have the floor.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second argument, speaking to the amendment, by the way. I have to refer to the motion as I speak to the amendment. Almost 72,000 Albertans chose to spoil or reject their ballots. That's a huge proportion. That's a huge number. [interjection] For the Minister of Finance 75,000 Albertans don't matter, but that's a large number, this despite the fact that some electronic voting systems used by some Alberta municipalities are not designed to count spoiled ballots. Had they been so designed, the number of spoiled ballots counted and recognized would have been much larger, I submit.

Everyone agrees; we agree that the current unelected Senate is not desirable. We need to take firm steps towards renewing democracy – Canadian democracy, Alberta democracy – despite the fact that the Prime Minister recently made some excellent appointments from Alberta. I name Mr. Roche, a distinguished Albertan who has served his country and his province with distinction over his lifetime, and Mr. Tommy Banks, a well-known musician in this province. They were good appointments. Too often, however, the appointments have been made of political insiders of the government of the day. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Perhaps hon. members might just make contact with me. I gather we're not going to have enough time in the five-minute question-and-answer exchange here, so I'll start keeping a list now of all people who want to raise questions to the hon. member when he concludes.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for providing some peace and quiet here so that I could make my point.

So it is true that the pattern in which appointments to the Senate have been made looks very much like the way the appointments are made here in this province by the Premier of this province to all kinds of important commissions, committees, boards. I have never been consulted by the Premier of the province over the last six years that I've been in this Assembly before he appoints people to the regional health authorities or when he appoints a financial management commission or the education commission. I've been completely left out of this. So I think the government side should feel quite comfortable with the way the Prime Minister of this country, whether it's Chretien or Mulroney before that, made those appointments.

We do need to change that system in the Senate here in Alberta and elsewhere. So the motion falls short of addressing these key issues that must be addressed, and that's why the amendment that

I'm supporting here is something that leads not only a serious discussion and examination in this Assembly, but I hope it receives massive support so that we can move on to taking important steps that need to be taken to make our governments here and in Ottawa more accountable, more democratic, more transparent for all Canadians, for all Albertans.

5:00

There are two possible solutions to this reform of the Senate: reform the Senate to make it elected and accountable or abolish it. We say, Mr. Speaker, that we'll be making a good start if we abolish the Senate altogether and then find ways of democratizing the House of Commons and this Assembly. The best way to do it – and this is what dozens and dozens of other established democracies in the world have already done – is to move to proportional representation so that this House and the House of Commons represent in a true form regional diversity, political diversity, cities and rural areas and municipalities, and other forms and sublevels of government.

We need to take seriously the question of broadening democracy, renewing democracy, revitalizing democracy, and if that is a goal on which we all agree, then the motion before us, obviously, is something that needs to be repaired. I think the amendment that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands is making is an attempt to address that serious flaw in that motion, and that's why I support the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you. On a question, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, indeed.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has just expounded on the virtues of one Mr. Tommy Banks, who was just appointed to the Senate a couple of years ago. Mr. Banks certainly is a wonderful person. He's a musician, but he really does not have any political expertise, nor has he ever been elected before, to my recollection. Given the fact that Mr. Banks is a well-known musician, given the fact that he has little political experience, I was wondering if the hon. member would back as the next Senator from Alberta Mr. Chad Kroeger from Hanna, who is the lead singer of Nickelback. Obviously, Mr. Kroeger has sold a lot more records. He has a lot bigger popularity than Mr. Tommy Banks has around Canada and around the world. So I guess my question is: using a similar type of criteria – and I would add that Mr. Kroeger has one other criteria, which is that he comes from a long line of politicians, as his grandfather was a former member of this Assembly – would the hon. member back Mr. Chad Kroeger from Nickelback as the next Senator from Alberta?

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address this vital question that has been posed here. If political experience were to be the precondition for getting elected or appointed to political positions, more than half the members of the Assembly would not be here. At least the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wouldn't be here. I had no political experience before this. That's an argument that makes no sense. If the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona in their wisdom made the decision to elect this member knowing that this member before he was elected had no political experience, then who am I to say that the conditions should be different? That's why I disagree with the premise of the question that to be elected or appointed to a political position, you have to be

a political bagman or you have to be a member of a party. No. I think these are matters that we should leave to the best judgment of the people who are making these judgments, who are the sovereign citizens of our province and of this country.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Additional questions? No additional questions? Then on the amendment.

Sorry. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you are on the question-and-answer section?

MR. MASON: No. I am asking if I am allowed to close.

THE SPEAKER: No, sir, you're not, under Standing Order 20.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE SPEAKER: Now, I have been notified that the hon. Member for Wainwright wishes to participate. Is this correct?

MR. GRIFFITHS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion today. When I was a youth – the operative word there being “was” – I became very involved in federal politics and the relative issues that many Albertans concern themselves with at the federal level. Some of the issues surrounded taxation, debt, and deficit levels. I'm proud to say that this province and this provincial government led the way on reforms regarding those issues. We now see that most of North America and, yes, even our federal government have adopted at least some of the financial practices of this great province. Financial reform was achieved primarily through a shift in the priorities and values of this province and later this nation. That shift in priorities translated into a shift of the will of the government of this province and, again, much later on, this nation. I was pleased to see that.

Financial reform, however, was only one step in the process of change needed at the federal level. Even more important than financial reform was, and remains to this day, the need for democratic reform at the federal level. You see, Mr. Speaker, if democratic reform was achieved, then true government accountability could be possible at the federal level, and with such accountability having a government that acts on the will of the people would be natural, inevitable, and a pleasure to see.

So I worked hard to bring the need for democratic reform to the attention of the media and the federal government for many years. I advocated on behalf of the candidates who ran in the senatorial election that was held in this province. Those candidates knew the issues of this province as well as those of the country. Those candidates had the commitment to represent the concerns of the people of this province. Those candidates had the commitment to attend Senate debates and meetings and to speak on behalf of their province and their constituents, and the two Senators-in-waiting, as they have been dubbed, still have a keen awareness of the issues. They still have a commitment to represent the concerns of the people of this province, and they still have the intention of one day attending Senate debates and meetings to work and speak on behalf of the citizens of this province, by whom they were duly elected.

Mr. Speaker, those are much different circumstances than exist today. Today we have a situation where attendance at senatorial hearings, meetings, debates, and, most importantly, votes is extremely low. There is no current requirement for Senators, Senators who are currently determined and appointed solely at the pleasure of the Prime Minister and at times the displeasure of the provinces, to show up for any of those important functions. Senators cannot be fired. They are never elected and, therefore, never face re-

election. In other words, they are never held to account by the people they are supposed to represent. Currently they are accountable to no one but the one individual who gave them their wonderfully rich position paid for by the taxpayers and, I'd like to add, the taxpayers that they have no accountability to.

Mr. Speaker, appointing Senators may have been acceptable when it was commonly thought that only wealthy landowners were intelligent enough and aware enough of the issues to vote. Since that time, however, our nation has matured and so has its citizens. Since its inception this nation has grown to achieve acceptance as an independent nation. Since that time we and the world as general citizens have developed a deeper understanding of the basic democratic principles, principles of economics, and an understanding of the delicate relationship between society and its needs and the government that attempts to meet those needs.

The notion of a Chamber full of wealthy and wise men whose sole purpose it was to be the sober second thought to the potentially dangerous decisions made by the elected and presumed ignorant masses is an Archaean idea that must make way for the 21st century. It is time that this nation adopted a triple E Senate. Most everyone in this province knows what a triple E Senate is and what the three Es stand for. This is just another indication that this province and its people are aware of the potential to improve democracy in this nation, to improve the quality of representation within the federal House and the benefits that it can have on the quality of decisions that will be made. The triple E Senate that so many Albertans have called for all these years is one that is elected, effective, and equal.

5:10

Much debate has been made about how equal the Senate should be if it were reformed into the 21st century. I believe there's only one option. The number of Senate seats should not be developed and divided according to regions. The only true equal Senate must be formed on the same basis that this nation was formed upon; that is, Mr. Speaker, it must be recognized that this federation is bound by the principle that no one province is more equal than another. No one province's concerns outweigh another's. Just as our Charter and our courts uphold the position that no one person is more equal than another, that we live in a partnership, a collective where all citizens have an equal voice and equal rights, so, too, must our parliamentary system uphold that principle. A bicameral system where one Chamber holds true to the principle of one person, one vote and another Chamber that holds true to the principle of equal votes for equal provinces must be made.

The second E, effective, is something that is necessary if the Senate is going to carry out its function as a Chamber of sober second thought, and, Mr. Speaker, they already possess much of the powers that are necessary to make the Senate effective already, today, right now, but what the Senate lacks is a mandate and real legitimacy so that it can fully utilize the power it possesses, so we come to the first E, the most important E; namely, a move to an elected Senate.

As democracies go, Mr. Speaker, it is accepted in principle and practice in democracies around the world that the representatives of the people, those who would make our laws and lead us by design, must be elected through democratic process by the people they represent, and as we stand here today, half of the federal government, one House of our bicameral system, is not democratic, not elected, and not responsible to the people. For a nation as progressive as ours that calls to the rest of the world to follow its lead on social, political, and economic issues into the 21st century, it is difficult to imagine that our federal government would refuse to put into practice those same principles of democratic and responsible government that it so freely advocates on the world stage.

It is obviously time for this nation and the federal government to

move into the 21st century by adopting a triple E Senate, but for those who have doubts about such a move, I would like to point out a few benefits to adopting such a change. First, Canadian unity has long been a hot topic. For a long time provinces and Canadians have debated the success of Confederation. It seems apparent to me, however, that the frustration they sometimes exhibit comes less from the type of cost-benefit analysis and more from a feeling that they and their province's issues have not been heard at the national level. A triple E Senate that is elected by the people and provinces that elected them based on equality of provinces with effective powers to debate, investigate, and vote on issues would allow all Canadians and all provinces the opportunity to participate at the federal level, and, Mr. Speaker, the only effective democracy is a participatory democracy, and the only way we'll get participation is with a full triple E Senate.

Current issues of provincial and national scope such as Bill C-68, Kyoto, the Canadian Wheat Board, taxation levels, and the like would find an avenue for debate and reflection. Indeed, past problems surrounding things like the national energy program and the Charlottetown accord could have been debated more intelligently and perhaps been solved before they came to conflict. Provinces and regions would have a process by which they can bring their concerns to the national table, and by bringing these concerns to the table, we will begin to truly understand each other, which can only bring us closer and enhance national unity. Mr. Speaker, wouldn't it be great if we debated the issues, made the decisions, and got on with prosperity instead of sacrificing that prosperity to discord and disunity as we have for the last 20 years? I believe it would.

As I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I am proud, proud of this government. Just as this government put fiscal responsibility and accountability on the agenda of every government and every politician on this continent, so, too, will this government bring the agenda of full and meaningful democratic and responsible government to the national agenda. Now is the time for us to lead the rest of Canada in achieving this vision of a Senate that reflects the true nature of Canada, a Senate that is based on legitimacy of elections, a Senate that speaks to the equal partnership among provinces in shaping the nation's future, and a Senate that effectively participates in the national political debate. I support this motion, and I call today on the federal government of Canada to recognize this request, recognize the province of Alberta's duly elected Senators, and show their commitment to beginning the process of change toward a triple E Senate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like first to most sincerely congratulate the hon. Member for Wainwright on, I believe, his maiden speech in the Chamber and one of which he will rightfully be very proud.

My question to the hon. Member for Wainwright has to do with the first E of the triple E Senate, equal. My question is: in the hon. member's opinion how many Senators are necessary in the upper Chamber to effect a critical mass so that the Senate could do its work?

MR. GRIFFITHS: Twelve times four is 48.

THE SPEAKER: Other questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to the mike, please, since you were cut off.

MR. McCLELLAND: The reason for asking that question is that therein lies the problem. In the United States, because of the number

of states, it's relatively easy to arrive at an equal Senate that gives a critical mass of a hundred. In our situation we're faced with the fact that the Atlantic provinces, sparsely settled in terms of population, have – and we agree on the notion of the equality. But if we were to, say, arrive at a hundred seats across the country, which is essentially the same as we have now and reflects the American experience, that would mean that there would be probably nine Senators representing each province. That would then mean that there would be an awful lot of people moving to Prince Edward Island, because the odds would be better than winning a lottery, and that's why the notion of an equitable Senate rather than equal, effective, elected by region – would we end up with an equitable relationship? I wonder if I can have your comments surrounding that notion.

MR. GRIFFITHS: It's a very complex issue. I'm not diametrically opposed to an equitable Senate, but I believe the evaluation has to come back to whether you consider this Confederation a balance of 12 equal provinces or three or perhaps four equal regions. I am committed firmly to the belief that it's 12 equal provinces. Every single one was formed by an act, and I believe that's a principle that we have to adhere to. I do believe that if we based it on equitable representation and divided the country into regions, we would again find controversy in a Senate where we would pit region against region and still wind up with much the same problem that we have in the House of Commons right now.

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

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Perhaps the hon. member has in mind dividing Ontario into three so that we might have 12 provinces.

My question to him is around the validity of an election that took place four years ago. If the federal government does not accede to the request of this Assembly and appoints individuals other than the ones being proposed, how long do we have to go before we decide that that election was invalid? I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has already indicated that another municipal election has come and gone with no vote being held by the provincial government to update the selection. So how many years will go by before it's time to have a new senatorial election in Alberta?

5:20

MR. GRIFFITHS: That's a very good question. I'm surprised I'm saying that, but it is a very good question. Typically, I think, using the U.S. example, examples from all across the world, different levels of government have their elections staggered over different periods of time. So with municipal elections being every three years, provincial being every four to five years, we could fix a time somewhere between five and seven years, and I would be favourable to that.

On the question of how long before the current Senate elections become invalid, that one is difficult to answer, because I know the hon. Senators-in-waiting personally and know how committed they are to the job, and I do believe they could still do the job. But to be honest, to answer your question, I don't believe that we need to even consider that fact. The only option if we're going to bring this country together and be effective is to get this done now, and we'll worry about the next elections when they're in.

THE SPEAKER: On the main motion, hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Given the time, I move that we call it 5:30 and that we adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]