

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, June 19, 1990 2:30 p.m.**

Date: 90/06/19

[The House met at 2 30 p.m.]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Each day in this place each one of us is expected to face the ongoing challenge of representing the concerns of all Albertans.

May God grant us strength and wisdom to carry out our responsibilities.

Amen.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of the Environment.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't expect it to come so quickly. I have two items to table today. I would like, first of all, to table answers to written questions 296, 237, and 338.

Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour today to table with the Legislative Assembly a document entitled Thanks from Alberta's Environment. This document contains the results of the first stage of a public consultation program leading to new environmental laws for Alberta. I will have more to say during a ministerial statement following Introduction of Special Guests.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table three copies of amendments from the Official Opposition to Bill 52 . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. member. We do have to go back through another procedure, because the Chair looked around and the next item of business was called.

Do we have unanimous consent to revert to tablings?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

(reversion)

MR. McINNIS: I wish to file three copies of 14 amendments to Bill 52 on behalf of the Official Opposition. These will make the Bill one that Albertans can truly be proud of.

I also would like to table, while I'm on my feet, three copies of a letter to the city editor of the *Edmonton Journal* from Daishowa Canada regarding the issue of licensing Daishowa

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

(continued)

MRS. OSTERMAN: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege today to introduce three gentlemen who are up in Edmonton working on

behalf of their community of Trochu. I'd ask them to stand as I introduce them: Mayor Allan Gehring, Tim Peterson, who's the town administrator, and Dick Sommerville, who looks after economic development. I'd ask all members to give them the traditional welcome.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

Environmental Legislation

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, moments ago I was very pleased to table with the Legislature the results of the first stage of public consultation leading to comprehensive new environmental legislation for Albertans. In January of this year the government released the government's environmental mission statement covering 10 basic principles and some 30 related policies. This document, Mr. Speaker, was mailed to more than 25,000 Albertans, and a further 10,000 requested a copy. Since then the responses to those documents have been used along with other initiatives to draft new laws for Albertans. I'm pleased to say that the responses continue to come in, and we will continue to use them as the public consultation process proceeds.

The document tabled today with the Legislative Assembly is a summary of what Albertans told us about their environmental vision. The comments have been organized around the environmental principles contained in the January mission statement. As well, a complete listing of all the comments is available in Alberta Environment's library.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans were candid. They were honest and forthright about the directions they would like the government to take to protect, improve, and wisely use our environment. Their comments were critical as well as complimentary, and this is therefore an honest document, which reflects Albertan's views on their environment. So on behalf of our Premier I want to thank the thousands of Albertans that responded to our invitation to participate in this process.

I also want to assure Albertans that the draft legislation that will be tabled very soon in this Assembly will reflect their comments. The release of this document today, entitled Thanks from Alberta's Environment, marks another milestone in the five-stage public consultation process that was announced in January. The actual draft legislative package will be released very soon, and Albertans will have the opportunity to review it over the summer and provide us with their comments in a more formal public consultation process this fall.

Mr. Speaker, this process will result in the passage of revamped environmental protection and enhancement legislation next spring. This legislation will incorporate the views of both stakeholders and the general public, and we are confident that it will be the most comprehensive environmental legislation in all of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I point out to the minister, who, by the way, I thank for prior notice of the ministerial statement, that there's a real difference between comprehensive and effective. Let me just point out one single example of the distinction. His statement says that the legislation will incorporate the views of "both stakeholders and the general public." It goes on for other things. The point, Mr. Speaker, is: the general public are the stakeholders, and the sooner this government understands that there's no distinction between the two, the sooner they'll be guided to drafting good legislation, which

I do hope follows the ministerial statement and the tabling of the responses from Albertans.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, if they're going to introduce this legislation and let it sit over, which is a good process – I can hint at another couple of Bills that would be worthy of sitting over for public deliberation: the natural resources conservation board Bill, that he wasn't even allowed to introduce, and maybe even game ranching – he might also consider, first of all, opening up the second proposal by Al-Pac for thorough public review. How about the Daishowa licence? How about Weldwood, Mr. Speaker? Procter & Gamble: I wonder if he'd like to eat the fish that are swimming around in the effluent outside of there.

You know, I really hope in the best interests of Albertans that this minister comes up with really good, thorough, and effective legislation to make the environment the first and top priority not only of the government but of all members of the Assembly. But until there's goodwill on these other matters, it's hard to believe that the legislation he says is going to be so thorough will, in fact, be as effective as it should be.

head: Oral Question Period

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MS BARRETT: Well, on the subject of the environment, Mr. Speaker, I see today that the president of Bow Valley – it's not Bow Valley Resources any more; it's another shell game, I guess; it must be Bovar now – has come to the government whining for \$50 million more so that they can expand their toxic waste disposal plant. Now, this, I remind you, is the company that gets all the profits and takes none of the risks, whether financial or environmental, in the great deal it got by its creation a few years back from the Lougheed government. But, Mr. Speaker, it isn't just the \$50 million they want. They also want the government to lift its ban on the importing of toxic wastes in Alberta so that they can make more money. Taxpayers take the risk; the company makes the money: good deal, right? Well, I'd like to ask this minister this: will he commit now to all Albertans that he is not going to allow this company to belly up to the trough one more time for public dollars for their endeavours?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the hon. member is missing the point. The point is that Alberta is the only province, the only province in Canada, with the capability of decontaminating property and disposing of those wastes. I think that's the point to remember in this whole situation.

Now, with respect to expansion of the plant, I don't know where the hon. member was, because certainly this was announced and made quite clear and there was full debate on it during estimates. There's no secret. This is no great announcement by the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Calgary Herald* today. This was a plan that was announced some months ago, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I didn't suggest for a minute that it was a secret.

By the way, I also remember year after year the Lougheed government promising the people of Alberta that this plant would never – I repeat, never – be used to import toxic waste from outside the province. It was a promise: Grant Notley called them on this, and he made them promise. Now it looks like they're ready to back down. I'd like to ask the minister why it is that he's being such a pushover for this company that's

making all the profits, raking it in, while the taxpayers and the people of Alberta suffer the risk? Why is he being such a pushover?

MR. KLEIN: Well, no one's being a pushover. I think if anything this government had the courage and the foresight and the commitment to forge ahead to do something that no other province has been able to do in this country. I think that's a remarkable achievement.

Now, I guess the hon. member would like to have this scenario prevail, the scenario where there are toxic wastes, wastes that contaminate the beautiful Northwest Territories, wastes that are gathered up, wastes that are driven all the way through Alberta to the state of Oregon, that pass within miles of Swan Hills. Is that the kind of situation the hon. member would like to see persist? I would like to be in a position of saying that we have a responsibility to the country, to our neighbours. We have a responsibility to our neighbours, especially our neighbours in the Northwest Territories, who have to drive their toxic wastes all the way through the province of Alberta, where they could easily stop at Swan Hills and dispose of those wastes quite safely. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, nothing will be done until there has been full discussion with my colleagues in government and full discussion with the people in Swan Hills and full discussion with Albertans.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the minister asked what it is that I expected. I'd like to answer that question. I expect for once this Conservative government to keep its word to the people of Alberta. Will the minister tell us now why it is that he would even consider bringing the hopes and prayers of his favourite company to cabinet asking for approval of this expansion and the money that goes with it instead of the concerns of the people and the taxpayers of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, how quickly the socialists change their tune. I can recall a year ago standing on a podium with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place when the whole question of taking the PCBs from St. Basil le Grand was discussed, and your hon. colleague stood up and said: I think that this is the right thing for Alberta to do, to take those wastes from Quebec. Now, what an about-turn we see, but so typical of the socialists.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question, Edmonton-Highlands

MS BARRETT: He still can't be trusted, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to designate the second question to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Lead Poisoning in Medicine Hat

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Minister of Occupational Health and Safety. This being Occupational Health and Safety Week in Canada, it's only appropriate that we think back a few months to the 16 workers and their families who suffered lead poisoning in Medicine Hat. As such I would remind the minister of his flimsy, unsigned, so-called report into this case, which he filed in the House on April 2, that stated that "there is no reason to believe there are any serious . . . effects now occurring in anyone," including children, and that there is no indication "that further treatment of anyone is required." So my question to the minister is: can he tell us what if any follow-up he or his department has done to monitor the health status of those workers and those children?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, there's been quite a bit of follow-up, and as a matter of fact the whole situation is still under investigation. I hope to have that report very, very shortly, and then we'll analyze it and see where we go from there.

MR. GIBEAULT: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister's impressed with his record, but the people of Alberta aren't, particularly the families of the workers who were poisoned. It may come as some news to the minister, but the government is now about to be served as a defendant in a \$7 million lawsuit alleging negligence of his department brought on behalf of the children of one of the workers. So I'd ask the minister now: given that these children have suffered serious and likely permanent disablement affecting their growth and mental development, would the minister table in the House the information he has had which formed the basis of his flimsy report's recommendations here?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, the families of all those involved, all workers, past and present, and everybody else have been talked to by Occupational Health and Safety, and they will continue talking to these people until we have the report and the investigation completed. Once that is completed, we'll then analyze the report and see what actions we have to take, and that will be done very, very shortly.

MR. GIBEAULT: Mr. Speaker, one of the unresolved issues was how 16 visits could be made by OHS officials to the plant and still 16 people are lead poisoned. So I want to ask the minister one more time: will he finally do the right thing and launch a public inquiry to find out why the visits of his department failed to protect the health of these workers and their children, or are workers in this province now going to have to launch legal actions to get him to do his job?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, it seems that every time the hon. member has a question, he has to scream and holler. I hear very well; I don't think he has to do that.

Mr. Speaker, when the investigation is completed – and it will be shortly – we'll have talked to everyone; we will have all the information we need. We will then turn that information over, if it's valid, to the Attorney General for prosecution, if that's the case, and the full results of that investigation will be made public, but until then, until I have the report, we can't answer those questions.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-McKnight.

Advanced Education Funding

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Graduate students at the University of Alberta contribute to the status and reputation of that university as being one of the best in Canada, a reputation which is in danger of being eroded. Government underfunding of all universities has caused the University of Alberta board of governors to take the desperate measure of increasing the continuous registration fee for graduate students by 378 percent starting this September. This scrounging for funds on the part of the University of Alberta clearly illustrates the impossible position that this government has placed the universities in. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Does the minister recognize that this increase is only one of many increases that graduate students living on fixed

incomes, limited incomes, often with young families, are faced with?

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I don't need to remind the hon. member that the funding of our postsecondary system is amongst the richest in Canada. This government and this minister control the increase in tuition fees at the undergraduate level. We're of the view that students within the system have a vested financial interest to see that they bear their fair share of the costs of their postsecondary education. It's my view and the view of the government that this year's funding for the University of Alberta and the other 28 institutions is sufficient to realize their objectives.

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Speaker, I believe that graduate students also share the concept that they must pay part of the cost, but a 378 percent increase in one year seems a bit ridiculous.

Will the minister finally admit that the boards of governors are being placed in an untenable position of having to make decisions such as these which have a negative impact on all students in the province because of government underfunding?

MR. GOGO: Well, Mr. Speaker, the matter of graduate students, of which by policy the U of A is allowed to have 6 percent of their enrollment – 6 percent foreign students and graduate students – is within their area of responsibility. I would think, based on comments I've heard to date with Bill 27 that's before the House, that the minister should not be encroaching on the boards of governors. I would think that if the boards of governors have a position with regard to graduate student increases, they'd have contacted me, but to date I've not heard anything.

MRS. GAGNON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister if he's willing to stand up to his big brother from Lethbridge and start advocating for the students in the postsecondary institutions in this province.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, if by inference the hon. member is inferring that the Provincial Treasurer is my brother – if that's the case, we obviously had different mothers and fathers.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the representation from the hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight to see that the postsecondary system gets its fair share of the provincial budget, and I'll certainly endeavour to do my best next time I'm before the Treasury Board.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Belmont.

Federal Procurement Policy

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years and months Albertans, and especially Calgarians, have had accessibility to the open bidding process of local goods and services through our government. However, they have expressed that they don't have that same opportunity with the federal government and that those living in central Canada seem to have more accessibility to federal contracts. While attending a procurement development mission in Calgary during December, the Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Mr. Paul Dick, announced that his department was moving ahead with plans to acquire a large amount of goods and services for the federal government through the open bidding process. To the Minister

of Economic Development and Trade: is the government of Alberta prepared to assist Alberta companies to take advantage of these situations?

MR. ELZINGA: Yes, we are, Mr. Speaker. I should point out to the hon. member that because of the pressure of the Alberta government in working in conjunction with Alberta companies, we have met with modest success whereby now the federal government has given a commitment to move to more of an open bidding process, and they've also given a commitment whereby we in Alberta will increase our share of federal procurement. We've continued to pressure for greater equity. We have met with some modest success, but we are going to continue to work with the private business sector as the process is ongoing.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, can the minister please give us an example of how Alberta companies are being made aware of this process and the opportunities?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, over the last number of months we have conducted some 14 procurement development seminars throughout the province. In conjunction with the federal minister that the hon. member has mentioned, we have worked closely in providing greater information to the private business community. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have recently tied into a western business network, which we do offer through the computer system, purchasing information to the private business community. In the event that they tie into that, they have greater access not only to the procurement that is available through us as provincial governments but also at the federal government level.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Belmont.

Labour Code Enforcement

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Minister of Labour failed to respond to my call for action against the author of the Maxam memo, a document that clearly counsels employers to violate the labour code. It's been two weeks since I provided the minister with information showing Mr. Willard Kirkpatrick as the author of the diatribe that urges discrimination against pro union workers. Will the minister advise the Assembly whether or not she is prepared to prosecute the author of this memo to the fullest extent permitted by the labour and criminal codes?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, I've now had an opportunity to see the material that the hon. member opposite has provided. Let me itemize what it is. Number one is a photocopy of a document purporting to be – well, in fact, it is photocopied on what purports to be letterhead from Maxam. Secondly, we have a photocopy of a handwritten letter, apparently a draft, with no signature on it whatsoever. Thirdly, we have the allegations of the member opposite.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me try for a moment to elucidate for the member opposite what is in the nature of proof. In the nature of proof you have to establish the actual authorship of a document. Normally you do not do this with photocopies; normally you do not do it in this House. Normally what you would do is produce the person who is presumably this member's source of information; secondly, presumably you would produce the actual originals of these documents; and thirdly,

normally you would produce the circumstances in which these documents have come to light.

Now, having said all of that, none of which the member opposite has done, notwithstanding that I've asked him to do so, and the material he gave me last Thursday is not what I asked him for two weeks ago – notwithstanding all of that, I am still very concerned that somebody, whether it be from that company or somebody outside that company or somebody with some axe to grind, it is impossible to tell . . . Notwithstanding all of that, Mr. Speaker, I am looking at the matter very seriously because there are allegations of at least an attitude that is simply not tolerated in this province, and that is one which would deny individuals in this province their constitutional, their Charter rights and their absolute right that we uphold in this government to have a collective agreement and to collectively bargain and, in fact, to pursue the union option if they wish to do so.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is part of the offensiveness about being in this Legislature. You start to be hypocritical and you pontificate.

Mr. Speaker, one point . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Order. There's no need for that. The Chair ruled on those comments last night. We really don't need it being brought back in the question period. So would you like to ask the question without that kind of . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will. [interjection]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Belmont in a moment when Edmonton-Highlands is quiet enough. Thank you.

Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the one hand we've got nurses and social workers who immediately are suspect and have actions brought against them, yet we have employers that when they do something wrong, we have paralysis in the government. Mr. Speaker, I anticipated that paralysis. I've done some of the minister's work and am now prepared to provide her with an opinion from a forensic document examiner that confirms the authorship of the memo. Mr. Speaker, it's a simple question: when might we expect some action on this matter?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite has some evidence, which I've been asking for for two weeks, I have asked him to share this with me. It is hardly the matter for this House to determine. There are channels where these matters should be considered, and if he has any further evidence – and let me stress in a very legally specific manner the word evidence, as in proof, and not simple politicking and not simple allegations – then let him bring it to me. Why grandstand in the House? The member should in fact have been down in my office two weeks ago – two weeks ago, Mr. Speaker – with the actualities that he's presenting rather than allegations and making politics in this House.

Lottery Funds

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, initialed Samsonite briefcases for government MLAs, a trip to Japan, preallocated community

facility enhancement program dollars to Tory ridings, insufficient accountability of lottery dollars, and who knows what else, Mr. Speaker? I have a fear that lottery sales might decline because members of the public are concerned about the spending abuse of lottery revenue by the minister responsible. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the minister shares this concern, recently demonstrated by defensive moves such as letters to newspapers and snide remarks at various volunteer functions. And a street named after him in Swan Hills yet Mr. Speaker, to the minister responsible for lotteries: what steps is the minister prepared to take to ensure that lottery sales do not drop as a result of the public's perception of irresponsible management of lottery revenues?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, lottery sales are continuing at the normal level that we anticipated for 1990, and irrespective of the statements being put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, there's absolutely no suggestion at all that in fact sales are going any way but up.

I do want to thank the member, though, for letting everyone in Alberta know that recently the town of Swan Hills did name a street after me. I thought that was a very significant honour, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member and all of my colleagues as well that the town of Swan Hills and the people of Swan Hills did it out of goodwill, and there was absolutely no suggestion that I had given them anything in return for it. I felt very humbled as a result of that.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, that's the street in Swan Hills full of potholes.

Mr. Speaker, to provide the necessary confidence and to ensure that the public do not have any misconceptions about lottery spending, will the minister now abide by the recommendations of the Auditor General and once and for all do things right?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's really of significant interest that I hold in my hand right now a document that was filed here in the Legislative Assembly a few days ago. It's a document put forward by the Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts, one of some 20 groups in the province of Alberta that is a beneficiary of lottery funding. The unfortunate suggestion being forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is that in fact there's something unsavoury happening with respect to the Lottery Fund. Mr. Speaker, I hold this report. This report was tabled by my colleague the minister responsible for the Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts. All expenditure levels with respect to lottery allocations are tabled in this House.

It is regrettable as well that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud continues not to avail himself of the opportunities to appear in this Legislative Assembly when an opportunity is provided for all members to attend such important meetings as the Committee on Public Accounts. I was there recently, Mr. Speaker. I brought along with me all necessary officials. Unfortunately, I was not able to provide all of the necessary comments that I wanted to make with respect to all of the expenditure levels, because some members of the opposition denied me that opportunity to provide that information. It's in the record: it's in *Hansard*; it's in the minutes of the Committee on Public Accounts.

I note that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was there. He raised questions on behalf of the Lottery Fund. I noted that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud bothered not to attend that very important meeting when the minister responsible was

prepared to answer any and all questions and, further to that, also conveyed at that moment in time that I would be prepared to provide any additional information that could not have been provided at that time. It is unfortunate, it's regrettable, but it's understandable that the member chooses to play the game that he chooses to play. That's very unfortunate.

Crop Insurance

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Speaker, this year we've had a wide range of weather conditions throughout the province. In fact, one day last week we had a forecast of snow in Banff, heavy rains in west-central Alberta, and a dust storm in east-central Alberta. In the Innisfail area the farmers have had a very difficult time seeding their crops. My question is to the Associate Minister of Agriculture: due to the excess amount of rain in parts of Alberta will the minister consider extending the seeding deadline for all-risk crop insurance?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is very accurate. We've had an unusual spring in our province. We've had extreme moisture really on one side of the province stretching from the Peace to indeed the border to the south, and we've had erosion and loss of seeding from high winds in the east. I must say that the members of the Legislature, such as the Member for Innisfail, have certainly made representations on behalf of the producers in that area to the minister and myself regarding their plight, and we have taken that request to the Alberta Hail and Crop Insurance Corporation board of directors, who are the people that would make those decisions. I am pleased to tell the member and others that the board of directors have made the decision to extend the seeding deadline from June 20 to June 25 this year. I would also like to mention incidentally that the ability to do this is due to the enhanced crop insurance program that we were able to bring forward this year.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you. I know that the producers in my area will be pleased with that announcement.

My supplementary: is this extension for all Alberta and for all crops?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the member brings forward a very important point. The extension in deadline does apply to the province. However, the crops that would be possibly insurable under that deadline are early maturing varieties of barley and Polish-type canola. I would caution all producers to continue to check with their respective regional or district offices as to their seeding intentions. I would also want to point out that in order to have the ability to insure those crops that I mentioned, barley and canola, they must have elected those crops for seeding under their crop insurance contract.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Pulp Mill Emissions

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of the Environment. When I asked him yesterday about samples of trout and Whitefish caught in Alberta rivers which are above the Health and Welfare Canada guideline for human health consumption safety standards, the minister said in *Hansard*, and I quote, "We don't know what the situation is officially," and again on page 1967 he said, "We as a government

are also waiting for the same information that he's waiting for," referring to myself. I do appreciate the open-mindedness of the hon. minister, but I wonder if he would answer this question: if you don't know what the situation is and if you're waiting for the same information as I am, what in the world are you doing licensing Daishowa to dump additional tonnes of organic chloride pollution this month, and why has he said that he's satisfied that Al-Pac can go ahead and dump even more organic chloride pollution?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have a totally different situation with respect to Daishowa. Daishowa is a state-of-the-art mill. We're talking about fish samples, as I understand it, that were collected on the Athabasca River. There was only one bleached kraft mill operating at that particular time. It was operating for the most part under the old standards, and it was an old mill at that particular time. That was the Weldwood mill. It has since been upgraded. So we're talking about mills that were putting into the river far more chlorinated organics than they would be putting into the river today.

With respect to the situation as it affects the fish being studied by Health and Welfare Canada, we're waiting now to hear from Health and Welfare Canada. If that agency deems that there is a health hazard, they will inform us and a health advisory will be issued. If they say that everything is okay, then I guess nothing more need be done.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, it's still the old game of moving pollution around from one plant to another without ever considering whether maybe we have too much pollution already.

I wonder with respect to Daishowa because they're about to begin a new program of dumping. Daishowa wrote, and I quote:

Daishowa Canada had originally understood, through discussions with Alberta Environment, that Drafts of the Licenses to Operate under the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts would be made available for public comment

before they were issued. Now, it seems like even Daishowa was double-crossed by this minister. In view of their expectation that there'd be a public review of their licence, will he now reconsider his position in the light of this new information and order a public review of the Daishowa licence?

MR. KLEIN: With respect to Daishowa, Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again: it's probably the cleanest mill in the world using the bleached kraft technology. They have achieved the highest standards achievable in the world today. Now, I can't understand this member's fascination with Daishowa. I'm still waiting to hear from him as to when he's going to go with his colleague up to Hinton, which has a similar kind of mill, stand up at a town hall meeting, and say: close the mill down.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton Gold-Bar.

Health Care in Rural Areas

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government assures the province that all Albertans have access to health care, but some rural communities have to live with the ongoing anxiety that the closest emergency treatment service is several kilometres away, often on treacherous highways. That's not what I consider equal access. The community of Kinuso has been receiving needed emergency service for over 50 years through the local health unit. Last year the Department of Health allowed the local health unit to remove this active

treatment component and left the 1,500 citizens of Kinuso without any emergency treatment care. Now, we all understand the present situation, the difficulty of trying to keep professional health care people in rural communities. My question to the Minister of Health is: does the closure of the active treatment component in Kinuso signal a move to restrict the practice of the community health nurse working in remote areas? What's the plan, Mr. Speaker?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the plan is multifaceted, and it certainly doesn't involve a simple answer to one simple question posed by the hon. member. This is certainly a government that has taken great efforts to ensure the opportunity for access with respect to building a marvelous infrastructure across this province, which is a little different view than perhaps members of the Liberal Party might take with respect to the building of health care facilities. We've taken the position of putting a new ambulance Act into the Legislature, which will deal with the issue of prehospital care and ultimately to the delivery of service to individuals across the province, using health resources in the best possible way. That's not just for Kinuso; that's for all Albertans. That is the aim, and that is quite frankly something that I think all Albertans can be proud of in the overall scheme.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary. The minister has indicated in correspondence that the minister believes treatment clinics staffed by nursing practitioners, like Kinuso, are a problem rather than an answer to the needs of smaller and rural communities. The minister has also indicated to the village of Kinuso that treatment regulations in the Public Health Act are under review. Would the minister please tell the House what that review has recommended? Is there a change in the supply of services to small communities?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, the role that health practitioners can play in our health system is really one which the Premier's commission had some discussion on in The Rainbow Report. At the present time there is a limited number of things which a community health nurse can do with respect to treatment. That's simply the reality, not just in Alberta but it exists elsewhere in our country. Enhancing the role, looking at the role of primary care, looking at the role of nursing in primary care, is clearly one of the reviews that is under way as a result of the Premier's commission and other reviews. I don't have a simple answer for the hon. member except to say that the delivery of services to people in Kinuso is as important to this Minister of Health as the delivery of services to a resident of downtown Calgary.

MR. SPEAKER: Redwater-Andrew, followed by Vegreville.

Extended Flat Rate Telephone Service

MR. ZARUSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications. In the last while from time to time rural Albertans, particularly some in my constituency in the Andrew area, have indicated difficulties with extended flat rate calling. As Mr. Speaker knows, recently the minister indicated that an announcement would be made by June 15 with improvements to the program. My question is: is this program going to continue as is, or will it be changed to eliminate some of the difficulties in these areas?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, Alberta docs indeed have the most extensive extended flat rate calling routes throughout our province. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, not one of those routes is named after me.

However, the hon. member is quite correct, and I appreciate the representations that he and other colleagues have made to me over the past several months. There are, indeed, communities that are having difficulty in meeting the criteria that is established for the extended flat rate calling route to be implemented. As a result of those representations, Mr. Speaker, we have asked AGT to perform an extensive review of the extended flat rate program and to see whether or not some of the problems that the hon. member has mentioned could indeed be addressed. In the course of that review, which is still ongoing, AGT, I'm pleased, did in fact make an announcement on Friday last for a new program, a program called select route. It's a new program that will enable AGT customers to individually choose the communities within 100 kilometres that they would like to call and pay a special individual flat rate in connection with that route.

The select route offers the customers really two plans, Mr. Speaker. One is a one-hour plan, and the other is an unlimited calling plan. In the case of the one-hour plan, individuals and businesses will be able to pay a flat rate of \$5 for an accumulated one hour of time with a 15-cent per minute increment thereafter, over the one hour. On the unlimited calling the rates are \$25 a month for residents and \$50 a month for businesses.

Mr. Speaker, this new select route will come into effect in November 1990 and indeed will provide individual choice for Albertans to have a special, select extended flat rate calling amount for their individual choice and their individual routes.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary, Redwater-Andrew.

MR. ZARUSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think my constituents and many rural Albertans will be pleased with this announcement as it'll address some of their needs.

My supplementary is: will the new program be accepted by the CRTC, as they'll be the new regulator?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that we have assurances that indeed all programs for rural subscribers – individual line service, extended flat rate calling, and the new select route – will indeed become part of the CRTC regulatory process.

MR. SPEAKER: Vegreville.

Disaster Assistance to the Northwest

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The announcement today by the Associate Minister of Agriculture that the seeding deadlines would be extended for farmers in the province will be welcomed as good news by those who are having problems with too much rain and those, like in my area of the province, that are suffering from too little. However, there are still very serious problems in the Peace River country, and I'd like to remind the minister that there are thousands of farmers there who weren't able to harvest their crops in the fall of 1989. Many of them lost their crop over the winter through a variety of different conditions, and now they find their land flooded. They're unable to seed a crop for 1990. What we have is many people in that area, Mr. Speaker, who will have essentially no income from their farming operations for at least a two-year

period. I'm wondering when the minister will recognize that the crop insurance program is just not adequate to deal with a disaster of this magnitude and will come forward with an announcement of some new money to assist these people in the Peace River country who so desperately need money in addition to what the minister of public safety announced in the fall.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly the member is correct that we have a situation in northern Alberta that is a carryover from last year. The minister and I took the opportunity a week ago to tour the area very extensively and to meet with over a hundred producers in that area to discuss their concerns, to ask their advice as to how best to deal with this situation. I would remind the hon. member and other members that crop insurance is production driven, and that is what it is intended to be. It is an insurance program based on production. So it is obvious that you cannot address an unusual problem through crop insurance. We will be continuing to work with the producers in that area as to the solution.

The extension of the seeding deadline may indeed assist a number of producers in that area. A great deal of the Peace River enjoys a very good growing season, and there is the possibility in some of the areas that they may yet be able to seed some canola and barley. In some of the areas we recognize that it is extremely doubtful that there will be any seed in the ground.

So crop insurance is an insurance program based on production. We addressed the disaster side of that issue on uninsurable items last fall in, I think, the very positive program under disaster services and explained to the producers at that time that we would assess the issue on insurable crops when a decision was made. To keep that commitment, made by the minister, myself, and the Premier in Sexsmith, we are in that process now working with the producer groups in the area.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, in 1986, when there was a serious flood affecting the Pembina River valley and the North Saskatchewan River, there was a flood recovery program, and as well in 1987, when we had a serious tornado, there was a tornado recovery program, both of which received funding assistance from the federal government through the disaster financial assistance arrangements described in the annual report of the minister of Public Safety Services. I'd like to ask him what efforts he's expended, what he's done to lobby the federal government to make sure that they contribute some money to provide to the municipalities, homeowners, and farmers who are very seriously affected by this disaster. We're not just talking about individual loss of income, we're talking about the economy of an entire region, Mr. Minister.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the federal government has agreed to cost share with the province of Alberta in this very important program. They agreed to do that several months ago.

MR. FOX: This is a new situation. It flooded . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Stony Plain.

NAIT/Westerra Merger

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education regarding the absorption of Westerra Institute by NAIT. In his February 1 news release he said, "Every effort will be made to minimize the loss of jobs

by faculty and administrative staff." In a statement on April 6 in this House he assured us that a successful transition would occur, and in a recent letter to me the minister said:

Attempts to minimize the negative effects of reorganization . . . appear to be successful; however, some individuals . . . may have been left very difficult options.

According to my information that's a very huge understatement, because over 50 percent of the employees have been offered completely unsatisfactory reassignments, which include changes from permanent to temporary positions, salary cuts, loss of jobs, and so on.

MR. SPEAKER: Question, please, hon. member.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: This is my question: will the minister agree to lift the June 30 deadline for employee placements from Westerra to NAIT so that the serious concerns of employees can be addressed and the reorganization can indeed be successful?

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, members will recall that on February 1 I had announced the expansion of the role of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology to encompass the programs of Westerra and that a transition team was appointed and that finalization would be July 1. I am frankly quite pleasantly surprised. Where I thought there might be a reduction of some 30 personnel, the reduction indeed is less than 10, so I am quite happy with the results of that transition. In direct response, no, Mr. Speaker, I'm not prepared to extend the effective date of the transition beyond July 1.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Oh, boy. My information, Mr. Speaker, is quite different. My information is that 15 Westerra staff have been downgraded from permanent to temporary positions and that 48 staff were offered positions and declined because they would have had to take significant cuts in wages. That comes to 63. Given that the minister's promises about reorganization have not been lived up to, staff concerns have not been addressed, many jobs may be lost, and there appears to be a very, very different perception of what's in fact happening, will the minister agree to implement an impartial, independent review board for employees of Westerra, thereby guaranteeing that staff concerns are dealt with fairly and impartially?

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, the transition team that I have appointed, in my view, is impartial. I would point out that my information is that the salary levels at Westerra had been somewhat above those at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. Quite frankly, I would point out the option, and that is that rather than taking a reduction in salary with a different assigned task, in most cases if an institution were closed, those people wouldn't have a job, let alone a reduction in salary.

MR. SIGURDSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The point of order is . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 13(2). During question period you called me to order with a citation. I'm wondering if "hypocritical" and "pontificate" were parliamentary phrases last night, why today

there was some intervention on behalf of the Chair, and I'd appreciate an explanation, sir.

MR. SPEAKER: At the time the Chair pointed out that with regard to the flow of question period there really was no need to bring back the phrases which had been dealt with earlier in this session, specifically last night, not only dealt with once but twice.

Now, the Chair would also like to bring to the attention of the House another difficulty with procedure which occurred during question period today. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods did state during questioning, and I quote:

So it may come as some news to the minister, but the government is now about to be served as a defendant in a \$7 million lawsuit alleging negligence of his department brought on behalf of the children of one of the workers.

The Chair brings to the attention of the House the sub judice rule and the fact that the matter under the sub judice rule imposes certain conditions upon the member raising the question as well as the minister called upon to make reply. It really is up to both the member and the minister to know whether or not the matter is sub judice. It is clear that even though the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods said that an action was about to be served, in actual fact it's come to the attention of the Chair that appended to a press release being distributed outside the House, indeed there is the statement of claim, and the statement of claim is dated June 14. So it would appear that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods knew full well that the matter was sub judice when raising it in question period.

Sub judice is not a convention; it is a rule of this House. It has been consistently applied, and for the period 1978 to 1988 there have been 19 rulings in that regard. The Chair respectfully requests the co-operation of all members and in particular the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods with respect to question period in future.

Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. House leader. Before we go on, might we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.
The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

head: Introduction of Special Guests (reversion)

MR. ELZINGA: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure, sir, to introduce on behalf of my dear friend and colleague the hon. minister of transportation, the Hon. Boomer Adair, a group from the St. Marys elementary school. They are joined by teachers Ruth Randolph and Rosaline Harris, by parent Brian Fletcher, and they are also joined by Gordon Smith, Susan Randle, Doug Longuard. They are in the members' gallery, and I'd ask if they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: **Written Questions**

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I move that all written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I also move that all motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

MR. McINNIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's with some reluctance that I enter the debate, but among the motions which the Deputy Government House Leader has moved stand and hold their places is Motion for a Return 183. Now, Motion for a Return 183 asks for "reports and analyses submitted to the government on tests for dioxins and furans in fish from Alberta rivers" during a two-year period concluded prior to the commencement of this session. This particular motion was received in the Clerk's office on March 15, 1990. Now here we are on June 19, three months and four days later, and the government still has not gotten around to addressing the question of when it's going to make this information available.

Now, there is some urgency in respect of this matter as of this last weekend, when an intrepid reporter with the *Edmonton Journal* ran across some information marked "confidential" in the possession of the government of Canada indicating that not one but two samples of fish which are caught in an Alberta river system by all kinds of Albertans and eaten – namely, Whitefish and trout – were found by Environment Canada to contain concentration levels of dioxin above the level of 15 parts per trillion.

Now, 15 parts per trillion has been set for some period of time by Health and Welfare Canada as the threshold level for human consumption of those particular fish. Now, there are many people who feel that that standard is too lax, that fish below that level are dangerous, because until this year there was research that appeared to indicate that dioxin was not something we should worry about. In fact, I've heard arguments like that from people on the government benches. Well, those who've been following the debate about the health effects of dioxin will know this: that the dioxin has a way of fooling or tricking the body's immune system. The protein receptors within our bodies look on a dioxin molecule and think it's a type of natural steroid, like estrogen, for example, and the protein receptors grab onto these dioxin molecules and thrust them right to the nucleus of the cells of our bodies. It's a way of wreaking havoc upon the body's system which is unparalleled among any other human-made chemical. In fact, as of this year dioxin has been declared the most toxic human-produced substance ever tested in laboratory animals. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has put dioxin on the list of suspected and known carcinogens – that is to say, cancer-causing materials. Health and Welfare Canada has officially declared dioxin to be a toxic substance.

Now, all of these things have happened because of new research and because of some rather startling exposés on some of the previous research that was relied upon by people in assessing this question. For example, some of the chemical companies who produce dioxin were found to be cheating in the way they reported their results. They would do things like test the subject group against a control group which worked in the same factory and was also exposed to the same material. So in

fact the control group and the target group were one and the same, which has caused other scientific people to use the terms "fraud" or "fraudulent" to describe those particular tests.

The motion which was submitted way back on March 15 requests simply for reports and analyses in the possession of the government covering that period of time. The significance of the first of the two dates, for the information of members, is that that was the date upon which the first set of results was received from a laboratory in Ontario indicating that some fish caught in the Wapiti River in the vicinity of the Procter & Gamble pulp mill were found to be over the Health and Welfare Canada guideline in the whole fish sample. There ensued a debate as to whether we should be concerned about the whole fish or merely the parts that are considered edible in some cultures, forgetting, of course, that native people do, for example, make fish-head soup, which is a delicacy, and they do eat some of the organs, you know, the liver and the heart, that kind of thing, which people from other cultures don't. But aside from that, we now have information that indicates that some of these fish within the filleted portion of the fish alone may be above that level. So for that reason . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, hon. member. Order. The motion before the House is "that all motions for returns . . . stand and retain their places." The Chair has allowed the member to speak for five minutes now with respect to the intricacies of the various reports, but this is not to be taken as an opportunity to speak to any or all of the motions for returns. So please let's now bring your argument into focus with respect to the motion that is before the House.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was attempting to explain the importance of this matter so that I could try to impress upon the members of the Assembly why they should not pass this motion, which would require Motion 183 to sit and hold its place again. Because this selfsame motion has been moved in respect of Motion 183 on every Tuesday and every Thursday between March 15 and the present. That's a lot of Tuesdays and Thursdays. That's a lot of stall; that's a lot of delay. I think the time has come, particularly in view of the reports on the weekend that there may very well be a public health hazard associated with this problem, that the government should finally deal with Motion 183.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just to like make a few comments regarding the motion before the House now, having all the motions for returns stand on the Order Paper. Before the House today we have Bill 37, the privatization of AGT, and I have on the Order Paper some 25 motions for returns, many of them dealing specifically with the proposal we have before the government. Now, the last time this motion came up, we did deal with some of the motions for returns. We simply ran out of time. I think it is more appropriate at this time to be dealing with those motions for returns dealing with the privatization of AGT proposal. I'm not sure how many of them the government intends to accept or reject, but I would hope they would accept the vast majority if not all of them and provide that very necessary information not only to myself but to my colleagues in the Legislature and to all Albertans regarding this very important proposal.

Bill 37, as I said, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it is on the agenda for this evening's debate once again. I have a number

of motions for returns requesting information about how the government made the decisions to privatize, how they made the decision to follow a particular route for privatization, and so forth. So by denying this information – or at least dealing with it – it makes it difficult for all members of this Legislature to adequately deal with the debates that will be before the House this evening. So I would urge all members to defeat this motion and that we do in fact deal with motions for returns today.

MR. SPEAKER: Additional?

The Deputy Government House Leader, in summation.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, in responding to the hon. members, I would simply remind them that the 83 members in this Assembly, each and every member, have in his or her view a responsibility to constituents they represent. Standing Orders under section 8 make it very clear: the only opportunity certain members have to bring business before this House is on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Today we have the Member for Edmonton-Beverly, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek representing their constituents, and they want to get a point across which is important to many Albertans. We have some 33 motions for returns. We've responded to over a hundred. I think, Mr. Speaker, in fairness to members of this House, that the government in its wisdom has chosen today to let the motions for returns stand, by motion, so that these hon. members may present their case to the House. Therefore, I would certainly hope hon. members would support the motion that motions for returns today stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

215. Moved by Mr. Ewasiuk:

Be it resolved that because of the crisis in the availability of affordable rental housing in Alberta, the Assembly urge the government to improve the rental situation by creating a rent review commissioner to review all rent increases, renew the commitment of the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation towards building and otherwise supplying low-cost rental housing, and co-operate with nonprofit and co-operative housing agencies to fund and provide quality, affordable rental housing alternatives. The government is urged to introduce legislation to provide for reinstatement of the renters' tax credit, encouraging the renovation of industrial, commercial, and school properties to quality, affordable rental housing, implementation of a tax which would apply to profits through the sale of residential property which is not owner-occupied, protection for tenants from high interest rates, and provision of funds equal to those budgeted for the Alberta mortgage interest shielding program and Alberta family first-home program.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to Motion 215. The motion does state that there is a crisis in the province of Alberta as it relates to the availability of rental housing, and this I say in spite of the comments the Minister of Municipal Affairs and housing has made that there in fact are now on the market rental accommodations that appear to be

available to most people. I think those rental signs are somewhat deceiving, because while there are vacancies, no doubt about it, most of these apartments and facilities that are available are in fact not affordable.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

I think that's the important component of the debate here: that while there are rental accommodations, many of them are not affordable. The recent rent increases have forced many individuals and families to relocate into less costly housing but also, at the same time, undesirable in terms of quality and location. What has happened is that people have moved not into a better quality of housing, as normally the trend is, but in fact have moved down in quality in housing. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think there is a need to have a piece of legislation that would provide for a rental review process to ensure that rents are not increased without justification.

There is no doubt that in the last several months, perhaps six months at most, landlords have increased their rents, in some cases as high as 40 percent. An argument has been made that these increases were justified to make up for low rents that were paid in the last several years because of the recessionary situation in this province. While I agree that some landlords may have had problems as a result of the high vacancy rates, the fact is that tenants, like most people – like landlords, like small businesspeople, and in fact some larger corporations – also suffered as a result of the recessionary situation this province was in. You know, employees were asked to take wage roll-backs, they had benefits cut, and, of course, there was a high rate of unemployment in this province. So while we can feel sorry for the landlords, I think there is a balance and equalization process where the tenants and workers and people generally suffered equally as a result of the situation. So I can't necessarily suggest that somehow because of enduring that period, now the landlords can justify rent increases to make up for lost time, to catch up. Because tenants cannot play catch-up. They either have to pay the higher rates at the cost of food and clothing and other amenities that they require for their families or move to what I said earlier, some cheaper accommodations, in order to maintain a roof over their heads.

Now, the tenants had an option, no doubt. They could have complained to the Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board for redress of all these rent increases, but that's after the fact. I think the time has come – and, of course, time would have been of the essence, because I think it's important for these matters of rent increases to be resolved quickly. The landlord and tenant board, while I commend them for the work they have done over the years, and they continue to do good work, I think the time frame in which the tenants were caught – the Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board would not have been able to really address their problems. In fact, I suppose in all truth the landlord could very well have justified his rent increases, so there couldn't have been much the board could do. They don't have the authority to roll back rents. They don't require the landlord to in fact make justifications for rent increases. It's simply a matter of going to the board and attempting to use their influence to ask for some justice from the landlord.

So there is some need of a rent review. When I spoke on this very similar issue when I spoke to Bill 208. I made reference then that there needs to be. I continue in this motion. I think this motion again makes reference that the government create "a Rent Review Commissioner to review all rent increases." I believe, Mr. Speaker, that in light of this other background I've

just given, there is a need to establish some form of rent commissioner to review all rent increases that would exceed the consumer price index. I come back to ask that the landlords must be recognized, that they are in a business, that they must turn a certain profit, and they must continue to be in business and provide additional housing. So I think there has to be recognition of that fact. On the other hand, I think there has to be some method that will regulate and control the kind of rents that are imposed on people without justification.

Now, up to this point, Mr. Speaker, the private-sector developers are not really interested in providing housing for individuals that require low-cost rental housing. That's becoming very evident. At the present time the developers are more interested in building huge, expensive homes, or else they are building condominiums, or else they're building senior citizens' facilities, you know, for the 55 and over kind of crowd. There's very little effort or incentive, in fact, for private-sector developers to get into low-cost housing. It's in this area, I believe, that the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation must review its commitment towards the meeting of this particular need. I think the corporation with its inception was really to provide affordable housing for those in need. It seems to have drifted away from that process. It's more into a lending mode rather than in fact supplying the available housing.

This can be done, Mr. Speaker, with the co-operation of nonprofit groups that are available and I think would be interested and have capabilities of providing state of the art housing for the needy. Also, there are the housing co-op agencies who could and would provide quality, affordable housing, an alternative form of housing that I think many, many people now are viewing as a good approach rather than single-family housing: get into a co-operative and build in that form. I think Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation should be involved more in doing that.

Now, government is providing funding for homeowners via the interest shielding program and of course the \$4,000 for the first-time home buyers. But again I have to ask: what about the tenants? When the Premier introduced these two programs during the last election campaign, why did he single out tenants as not worthy of assistance? That's a bit interesting to me. Are they not important enough as homeowners? Do tenants not vote in such high numbers as homeowners might? Or is it that most tenants are second-class citizens and don't warrant the consideration of the government? Any one of those I think aren't worthy. If we're going to deal with and provide assistance to a segment in our society, I don't think we can or should single out groups. In fact, as I have said a number of times in this House, tenants in fact make up almost 50 percent of the population in this province and particularly so in the larger urban centres. So we're not talking a small group; we're talking a large component of our citizens who have been totally ignored by this government.

This motion, Mr. Speaker, calls for the bringing back of the rental tax credit. As you know, this was in place at one time, a few years ago, but the government chose – again, I suppose, for economic reasons – to remove it. I believe this would go a long way in helping those on fixed or moderate incomes.

Something else that I think this government can do to assist those people, and particularly tenants, is to have a look at our minimum wage structure in this province. Many tenants are tenants not by choice but by necessity, by design. These are the working poor. Frequently they are single parents, quite often women. So I think this government again is responsible to bring in some wage equity programs to ensure that the wage structure

is such that it will accommodate the tenants, the people who are forced to live in the accommodations and who really have no alternative but to rent. When their landlord says, "I'm going to increase rent," they have no alternative: either they pay the rent at the cost of food and clothing and other things to live with, or they have to move to perhaps a cheaper facility. Quite often that's where the slum landlord comes into play. Certainly the quality of life for these people tends to worsen. I think we need some legislation that is going to provide protection for these people.

This motion also calls for the implementation of a tax which would apply to profits on the sale of residential property which is not owner occupied. Again, what I'm talking about here, and I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs and housing made some comment earlier this session: we talked about the possibility that there were some individuals that were buying up property, flipping property, and making a profit, or buying property, increasing rents, and then selling the property as a viable operation. I think these are people that are gouging the system, are abusing the system, and I think there needs to be the imposition of some form of tax on those kinds of operators. The tax would apply to property sold within two years of purchase. So the legitimate owners, the people who want to buy property, have had it for several years and at that time may wish to sell, I think you have to give some opportunities. It's the guys that come in, own it for a month or two, flip it, and walk away with a profit, leaving tenants to pay the difference. It would also exclude such places as a principal residence, renovated properties, recreational properties, industrial and commercial properties. We have to ensure that there is room for activity in these other areas, but when it relates to housing facilities, I think there have to be some provisions to ensure that the abuse does not occur.

Now, interest rates probably have as much to do with the cost of housing as any other component, and that is why I think we on this side of the House get really quite frustrated by what I would think is the lack of government action to express our disapproval of the federal policy on interest rates. I know that the Premier again during the last provincial election went about the province and indicated he was going to fight the interest rates. He was going to go to Ottawa and tell Mr. Mulroney that there is a province west of Ottawa named Alberta whose economy is somewhat different than central Ontario and that his policy of interest rates should not be based on a small portion of the provinces but take into consideration all parts of the country. But we are frustrated because up to this point there really is no visible evidence that the Premier has done anything, and in fact if he has, he hasn't been too successful. The high interest rate policy continues to be there. It continues to have an influence on both the developers and buyers of homes. If we are going to deal with housing and have affordable housing for all people, then I think the matter of interest rates has to be addressed.

I wanted to touch on the other area before I conclude. This motion also asks about, and I spoke to it briefly earlier – it primarily is a result of the high interest rates – the need to provide the same or an equal kind of protection for the tenants as we do through the Alberta mortgage shielding program and the Alberta first home program. Again, here is where we are providing programs to one sector of society, the first-time home owners. I'm not being critical of the programs. I think those programs obviously are recognized as having a need and are providing valuable assistance to many Albertans. But why are

we excluding a large portion of our population by not providing some kind of assistance for them?

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that this motion be supported in this Legislature. I think it addresses the needs of a large number of people. Particularly the implementation of a rent review process is long overdue. There are provinces in Canada, some eight or nine of them, that do have one form or another of a rent review process. I think it's necessary. As I spoke on Bill 208, there is a very simple and effective implementation process that a review commissioner, if one were created, would be attached to the Ombudsman's office. As you know, the Ombudsman has an excellent reputation in this province. I think he is well recognized and respected by the people in this province for the kind of work that they do. Similarly, I think we would gain that kind of respect for a rent review commissioner if he was assigned to that office.

With those comments, I will then take my seat.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Millican, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. SHRAKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Beverly for bringing forth this problem. Again, he's got some good ideas here, and, unfortunately, he's got some bad ideas.

This Motion 215 seems to be very similar to Bill 208, which we debated in the House not that long ago. In this motion he's got two ideas. He's got a good one and he's got a bad one. Which you want to hit first I don't know, but he's got the idea of a rent review commissioner – another committee. The other one is to renew the commitment of the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation to go out and build some more affordable housing. That seems like a good idea. That seems to be a solution to the problem.

If you go into solutions and answers, you know, throughout the world we've had the problems of shortage of housing and so on. Well, in Russia, the Communist countries, they have their solution. They created a bureaucracy that usually discouraged the building of more homes, created lots of rules and regulations to control the existing housing stock. They kept the rents low and so on. I guess there they had – well, they wouldn't call him a commissioner; they'd probably call him a commissar. They kept the price of food and housing low. I imagine they had a real good food commissioner, which they call a commissar. What do they have on the shelves throughout those countries? The shelves were bare, no food. The price was low, but you can't buy no food, so it didn't do you much good.

Then their housing. Those are the lowest rental housing in the world. But what did they end up with after they struggled since 1945 to provide some adequate housing for their people? They tried hard; they really did. In their own attempt they tried to ease the housing shortage. At the end of World War II in 1945, their country was devastated. The homes had been burnt, bombed, destroyed; the cities had rubble. They had to restore it, and they tried. They made great gains. They kept trying and trying, and now 45 years later they are still trying. There's no longer the rubble from the destroyed homes or anything. They have their housing commissioners or their commissars with the central control.

It's the most interesting statistic you'd ever read of a country that advanced so far and yet went nowhere: the housing now is no better than the housing was back in the days of the czars. At this point they have four and a half million families who in their suites average less than 53 square feet per person.

You stop and think about that one for a moment, especially some of you guys who've got a thousand square foot suite. Then a few of you I know of have a 2,000 square foot home and there's only three or four of you. You get home sometime and figure out if you only had 53 square feet per person; that's pretty dismal. So that's not a very good record.

I guess they have 6 million of their people living in communal apartments. That's in Russia. They tried. They had their central system and so on, and they have very cheap rent. But I imagine a lot of you here don't know what a communal apartment is. It's very simple. You and another family live in that one apartment. Then if you get up a little better on the waiting list and you finally get out and get your own apartment in some of those apartment buildings, you and the family down the hall share that bathroom. Some of you who have two – and some of you, I know, in this House have three bathrooms in your home – start thinking about your family sharing the bathroom down the hallway with the other family. That is not progress. I guess they have 14 million people on their waiting list. Now, I thought we had problems here, but when you hear of 14 million people on a waiting list for housing, that's pretty rough.

Anyway, with their central planning and their government bureaucracy and their endless regulatory boards, the Russians, the Soviets, will never solve their housing problem if they try it for another 45 years. That includes Russia, Romania, Poland, Hungary. All those countries have a problem. But they're throwing off the central control, the regulations.

Now, let's go back to our horrible problems we've got here in Alberta. They don't seem quite as bad as they used to, but there is a problem because we want a high standard of living, we deserve a high standard of living, and we will have a high standard of living. Actually, back in '82 when we had the crash in Calgary, at that point the city of Calgary produced, I think, \$3 billion worth of construction. Our little old city down in the south – that's not the whole province; it's just that one city – created more construction than all of England, Ireland, Wales, and Britain put together. That's quite some record. Unfortunately they built too much and then we had a letdown; we had a recession, a depression, whatever you want to call it. Alberta Mortgage and Housing was involved in that. After they had the crash, Alberta Mortgage and Housing . . . That's the other part of this motion, a part I do like, and I commend the Member for Edmonton-Beverly for going after this. He does. He's got a good idea in with his bad idea: that they've got to crank up some affordable housing. They did a good job. They did their job too well. When the crash came, they had provided housing for the people most unlikely ever to own their own housing.

In many countries of this world it's a dream to own your own home, a dream that may never come true, while here in Alberta it's a very common occurrence that you go and buy your own home. But a lot of their incomes were low. Alberta Mortgage and Housing took them in. The down payment would hardly cover the cost of the legal transfer over to them. Needless to say, they had no equity. Then, when the crash hit – the crash hit real hard, prices dropped 20 percent to 40 percent – the house was not worth what they owed on it, they walked away, and Alberta Mortgage and Housing ended up with these houses. Then this House and I think all parties here got in on the act of using the old favourite whipping boy, whipping away on Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation, screaming about their losses, that terrible company, and that Crown corporation's only fault was that they did their job too well and built too much housing. And they had a lot of housing. They

could have dumped it on the market and drove the price of housing down even further, but they rode it out. Thank goodness they did, because now there's a market for that housing. They've made wise decisions.

What we in this Legislature, at least in this government, have got to look at now is that there's a housing shortage coming again. Do we revitalize old AMHC and have them go at it again to provide affordable housing? Because if you crank up bureaucracies and so on – private enterprise is not going to go in there and build housing. Frankly, I don't know if they could go and build housing in the existing market. If you want to crank up a bureaucracy, let's pick another province, any province. Pick the wonderful province of Ontario. They have a staff of 600 at an annual cost of \$40 million. Now, we're not as big as them, but I'm sure we could probably keep that big a staff too. We have a tendency to . . . We like to do those things. We like to do it big with lots of staff. But we would probably at least have 150 staff, at \$10 million, to have bureaucracy harass and hassle those in the existing housing stock. Well, that's not going to encourage these people, the Ralph Scurfields – he's no longer with us, but those types of people – to go and build more housing.

The Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation did crank out affordable housing. That's the area they went into, and that's where the shortage is now. If you've got the dollars, there's not a shortage of housing. If you've got a quarter of a million dollars, you can go buy a house tomorrow morning anywhere in Edmonton or anywhere in Calgary just about. If you don't mind paying \$800 or \$900 a month, the paper's full of housing. But the problem is that we've got families that can't quite hack it. That'll take 40 to 50 percent of their income. In today's quality of living, that's not acceptable. I wouldn't want to pay half my income for just my housing. That would squeeze my life-style pretty bad. You think: what is the solution? Well, it's not to create another bureaucracy, rules and regulations, because you've driven the investors away pretty bad so far. Our cities and municipalities have been pretty bad on that type of thing due to the planning laws, planning controls.

In fact, I'm just going to go through this little exercise one more time. Let's say a family wants a modest home of 800 square feet. Most of you here live in a lot bigger home than 800 square feet. In fact, I'd almost say: if anybody lives in 800 square feet or less, if that's your main home and not just your suite while you're in Edmonton, put up your hand. There's nobody here that would be putting their hand up. Anyway, with today's construction costs, you cannot build a house for \$50 a square foot. You can't do it. If you can, let's get together and we'll build some housing. There is no more \$50-a-square-foot housing. And that's not counting the cost of land. Land prices, due to the planning regulations in our cities and towns, have gone up horrendously. Land's expensive. Then servicing: the city of Calgary somehow got the idea, the same as maybe we do sometimes, and all cities have done this, that the land developers are wealthy, they're rich, "Let's really sock it to 'em, let's get 'em good," and you're up to about \$8,000 to service a lot. In the old days you could buy two or three lots for \$8,000, but that's your servicing costs to get the water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer, your sidewalks, and various things in there. The back lane and street lighting usually is even over and above that.

At any rate, not even counting the cost of the land or this expensive servicing, if you built 800 square feet at \$50 a square foot, that's \$40,000. Add 15 percent interest. Any way you cut it, that's \$6,000. Twelve months into \$6,000 is \$500 a month. You've still got taxes on top of that, because it's the old PIT:

principal, interest, taxes. If you have only an 800-square-foot unit but it's rental, the city will charge – and they do it; you can check on it if you don't believe me – a higher rate for the commercial – they call it commercial – or rental units than they do for the regular single-family residential home. So your rental unit will be \$600 a year for that little old 800-square-foot unit. Twelve into \$600 is \$50 a month. For sure, no matter how you cut it, \$550 a month, if you're lucky, is what you could build and go on the market with if everything went perfectly.

That doesn't count the empty months. Somebody moves out; it takes a month to get somebody in. What if it needs repairs? Or the other thing which happens occasionally: what if the people in there wreck the place? So at today's interest rates . . . And I commend the Member for Edmonton-Beverly. He did go ahead and identify the problem. It's not the landlords or the gougers or the scoundrels or, you know, the baron robbers or something. It comes back to the government and the interest rates.

But let's take this same scenario. It's not complicated; you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure this out. What if there's 8 percent money. And there is 8 percent money in the world. You can find 8 percent money if you're in Japan; you can get all the money you want at 8 percent. You can get it for less. That same \$550-a-month house – I could go out, me and my little construction company, and build an apartment building or whatever, and at 8 percent money it drops to \$317 a month. So rather than bringing in the rent review committee or the commissioners, or whatever you want to call them, and trying to crank up some kind of bureaucracy, just find a way to build more housing. Because if you've got a shortage . . . Goodness, haven't we learned anything from just looking at what happened in the eastern countries? They didn't do this because they were mean or miserable; they really thought in their minds that the way to go was to take existing stocks and control it instead of creating additional stocks. They've done it with the food: you know, low prices on food, but you can't get food; the darn shelves are bare. In fact, in Moscow I guess it got to the point that if people lined up in front of a store, somebody going down the street would get into the lineup. They didn't know what it was, but they thought it must be something good and would stand in the lineup for an hour to get in there to see what it was they could actually get. Maybe they could get beefsteaks or pork chops. Well, they didn't get beefsteaks, but maybe there was meat available or these types of things. Instead of addressing the problem when you've got a surplus of creating more – which is the old free enterprise, capitalist way, which has kind of got its faults too. It does create more. But again, if you create the bureaucracy, you don't create more and you stifle those guys who know how to build.

Did you know that at one time the little old company of Nu-West Development was cranking out over 5,000 homes a year with a staff of less than the 600 the housing commission in Ontario has? I'd rather see us crank up 5,000 more homes than to stifle it and create a bureaucracy that is going to control what stock we've got. If any of you have any doubt on the questions and the things I've got here, I've talked to a few of these people. I've talked to Billy Steinberg. I've talked to Bill Friedman. I've talked to some of the guys with Carma. I've talked to some of these developers and said, "Why are you not building more affordable housing?" They'll give me the answer: because that's the business they're in; that's the way they make their living. They would like to build more housing because they'd like to make a profit.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Member for Edmonton-Beverly for good intentions, and he has one good idea. I don't like his other idea because he goes back to that old communist or socialist type of thing which would stifle development. If you could chop the one part of the motion out, I'd say let's all support it. But again, it's tied in with two ideas, so I'm very much against this type of motion.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion the Member for Edmonton-Beverly has brought forward today of course addresses a whole number of areas that are related to housing, and I want to touch on a number of them and keep my comments relatively short in respect for the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly first touches on the requirement from his point of view of the need for a rent review commissioner, and we've addressed this from our point of view in the past. A rent review commissioner to us is symbolic of having actual rent controls in effect, and we simply do not believe the answer is rent controls. Rent controls have been tried in this province before; they've been tried elsewhere. Anything that is going to tamper to a large degree with the marketplace, with the initiatives of the private developers as such, that is going to dampen their spirits, is going to compound the problem, and that's my concern.

I have addressed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in the past the question of the odd one that causes us some problems. A question of the landlord, for example, in Lansdowne Park that increased rents by 41 percent. However, my understanding is that because of the greed that was demonstrated there, a good number of the tenants left, so I guess the old expression "what goes round comes around" bears some truth. But the concern is that even though the vacancy rate picture is not as bad as was anticipated at one time, it still is possible that we could see further declines in the vacancy rate and could in fact see a critical situation. We could see a crisis, and when that crisis occurs, we have to be prepared for it. Our position in the Liberal caucus is that these types of programs have to be planned out properly and have to be planned out ahead of time, that you have the mechanism in place so that when the crisis hits there's a mechanism that automatically deals with it. That's why we put forward the proposal, why we put forward the Bill: that there should be renter rebate based on income requirements, based on need when the vacancy rate falls below 2.5 percent. Further down in the motion, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly calls for the reinstatement of the renters' tax credit. I'm pleased he has recognized that there is that need to try and tackle this problem when it occurs at that particular time.

I must add to my earlier comment that I do appreciate the minister of consumer affairs investigating and reporting back very promptly the concerns I did raise with a couple of isolated cases. I hope as a result of his investigation that it has put those landlords on notice, that there are times government is prepared to step in and investigate, at least ask questions. That in itself does tend to keep people on their toes to a degree.

We've spoken in the past and I'll mention in passing the role of Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation. That is one that we advocate should be directed toward providing housing for disadvantaged persons and for people that are on very, very limited incomes: social housing, housing for seniors, housing for

disabled persons, housing for people that are living in poverty, which we see a great deal of in Edmonton-Highlands where the problem of housing that is simply not sufficient, that is not suitable for people to live in, still exists. That's a problem that hasn't been addressed.

Mr. Speaker, we also feel that there's a need for the minister responsible for housing to work closer with parties that have a vested interest, such as architects, developers, home builders. We can look at scenarios in other parts of the continent. We can look at the United States where they have developed affordable housing, housing that incidentally is only 400 square feet but still suits that basic functional purpose of providing shelter. It's a starter home. It may not be the most luxurious, but it can be built at a reasonable price. Architects, if they're motivated, can in fact show a great deal of creativity, a great deal of ingenuity, when it comes to developing new thoughts. All we have to do is look at some of the architects that have been bred right here in Alberta. We look at one by the name of Doug Cardinal, who has done a great deal creatively when it comes to the architectural world, not necessarily in housing but in architecture. We look at the other example I pointed out before, Don McDonald in San Francisco, who has probably led the way in developing affordable housing for those living in poverty. There's a lot to be learned from the initiatives he has shown.

Another area that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly has touched on and one I want to spend a bit of time on can be very, very troublesome to all caucuses, not just our caucus here but undoubtedly the New Democrat caucus and the Tory caucus as well, and that is the question: what type of assistance, and when does government step in to provide direct assistance to renters, to homeowners? I talked in terms of the mechanism at the 2.5 percent vacancy rate, when it falls below that. That I stand by, because it does in fact serve people of lower income. It would be geared towards income and such, so it isn't dollars being thrown to people that in fact don't need that government assistance.

The member does touch on the interest shielding program, Mr. Speaker. The interest shielding program, if we back up in history, had a strange birth. It happened overnight. It was announced during the midst of an election. It wasn't well thought out. I think history will bear out that if one were to go back and do some of the interviews that were conducted involving the people that put the program together, even officials within the Department of Municipal Affairs had no idea at that time as to how the program was going to function, had no idea what the cost was. It was put together as a scramble in an attempt to demonstrate that the government was prepared to serve the people it was attempting to get votes from. And it didn't work at all. It has created a very immense problem. It has generated a situation, Mr. Speaker, where now you have people and some of those people unfortunately are needy. A percentage of people under that program do in fact need that assistance. That's the difficulty. Not all of them do by any means, but a small number do.

What's happened is that a number of people have gone out there, they've bought homes, they've got the \$4,000 interest-free loan, they've counted on the interest shielding to kind of bank them through for a period of time, and they've put themselves in a situation where they're now dependent to a degree on that interest shielding. Of course we see interest going up, going up, and compounding the problem. It's the government's own creation, and now they're somehow going to have to bail out of it. I'm not sure how they're going to do it. I listened to the

comments of the minister responsible for housing. I listened to his comments when he expressed concern about government entering the marketplace. I heard his reservations about government doing that type of thing, and it's the same type of reservations we have in our particular caucus.

Mr. Speaker, when you analyze that program very closely, it's a program that is costing Alberta dollars, paid for by Alberta taxpayers, to offset a problem created by the federal government's policy on high-interest rates, their fiscal policies. Again it's a situation that we the taxpayers of Alberta have to lay out money to counteract, rather than trying to strong-arm the federal government to work within realistic interest rates. I'm not sure it's fair to the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, that they should be asked to do that, because it is, in fact, not fiscal policy brought down by this particular government.

Our caucus wrestles with these types of things, because we consider ourselves a caucus, a party that is compassionate towards people, and when there is a need to help people, we feel that government can't just let those people fall by the wayside. However, this program is just a bit too open-ended. It's way too open-ended. This program, if a person qualifies, could directly benefit someone with the income of Peter Pocklington provided they met the other criteria. But there is not that income limitation there. It does serve a number of people, no question about it, but it's also serving a great number of people that don't need that assistance but are going to take that assistance if it's provided for.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the other priorities we have in this province, when I look at health care, when I look at education, and when I look at what people in Alberta are saying, let's demonstrate some fiscal responsibility, let's start tightening that belt a bit, and let's start tackling that deficit. People aren't that foolish out there that they can't read what's happening in the paper. They see the world price of oil dropping to \$16 and something a barrel. They recognize that the crunch is there when we talk in terms of a growing deficit and trying to provide programs of importance, essential programs. For those reasons, Mr. Speaker . . . You heard the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, or somebody would have heard him – those of you that follow him very closely, which I understand is a great number of you, would have watched him on television making his comments as to why our caucus will support what we expect the minister will announce in the next few days, and that is that the program is not going to be extended.

Mr. Speaker, on that particular note, I've covered a number of areas that are addressed in this particular motion, but as I said earlier in respect to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the people in the gallery that are hear to hear specific debate, I'm going to move that we adjourn debate on this motion.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has moved adjournment on Motion 215. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

Prior to going on to the next order of business, which is Motion 216, may we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**
(*reversion*)

MR. PAYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity from the members to revert to the Introduction of Special Guests, for we certainly do have some special guests in the Assembly today. I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members of the Assembly about 75 deaf students who have come today with their principal and several teachers as well as several deaf leaders. It's a rare privilege to have them in the Assembly. Before I invite them to stand in the Assembly, I wonder if today I could ask the MLAs to incorporate into their warm greeting a wave of the hand, and with that I ask our guests to stand in the Assembly and be greeted by the members of the Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than
Government Motions**
(*continued*)

216. Moved by Mr. Payne:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government, given the cultural uniqueness of Alberta's deaf community and the linguistic uniqueness of American Sign Language,

- (1) to recognize American Sign Language as a language of the deaf in Alberta and
- (2) to incorporate it into Alberta's grade school and postsecondary curriculum as an available language of instruction.

MR. PAYNE: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank most sincerely leaders of the deaf community for their help in developing Motion 216 and bringing it forward to a position where it can be debated in the Assembly today. I would also like to thank the many government and opposition MLAs who have offered their encouragement along the way.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to explain why I'm sponsoring this motion today. The explanation goes back several years when it was my privilege to chair a one and a quarter million dollar fund-raising drive to endow a chair of deafness research at the University of Alberta. A key player on that fund-raising committee was a gentleman by the name of Roger Carver, who at the time was on the staff of the Western Canadian Centre of Specialization in Deafness located at the University of Alberta. After successfully reaching our one and a quarter million dollar goal, Roger helped me to understand that there were still a lot of legislative and regulatory and societal changes needed as far as the deaf in Alberta were concerned. One of these was the need for ASL, the American Sign Language, to be officially recognized by the government of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps it might be useful and informative for the members in the Assembly today for me to explain what ASL is. First of all, I'd like to point out that it's the language I was raised on by my deaf parents, Frances and Edward Payne, so many years ago in Windsor, Ontario. Briefly stated, ASL is a visual language based mainly on symbols and gestures rather than on words and on the grammar of the spoken language. It is not simply a signed literal and emotionless translation of the spoken word. ASL has a beauty that is hard to describe but so easy to feel. I would like to illustrate the point with a personal

experience, if I could. A number of years ago my mother was invited to attend a church in south Calgary on Christmas Day. Of course, I accompanied my mother and tried to interpret for her as we sat in the front pew of that particular congregation. During the course of that Christmas celebration a group of about 20 young ladies – and I don't believe I've ever seen more beautiful young ladies – stood to sign for my mother *Silent Night*. It hit me like a ton of bricks what Christmas must be like without carols. I'd like you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of the Assembly to know that that occasion was probably one of the most moving cultural experiences of my life, and it helped me finally to understand the inherent beauty of the language of ASL.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the primary advantages of ASL from the perspective of the deaf – and this is part of the answer I got when I asked them the question, "Why do you want ASL so much?" In part, I was told that deaf students with confidence in their own language are likely to demonstrate a better attitude toward learning English-language skills like writing, reading, and even speaking. Competence in their first language, ASL, is bound to influence the mastery of their second language, whether it be English or French or whatever. Let it be clearly understood that the deaf community rejects completely the now outmoded theory that English immersion provides the best opportunity for the deaf to acquire skills in language. Surely history has demonstrated in North America and even here in Alberta that sign language has the capacity to resist language control policies and guidelines that have been formulated and implemented to discourage the use of sign language.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

It goes without saying, Mr. Speaker, that virtually every deaf-related association in the province has heartily endorsed Motion 216. The Alberta Cultural Society of the Deaf, in correspondence from Linda Holewa, their president. The Alberta Association of the Deaf, in correspondence from that association's president, Mr. David Mason, who is with us in the gallery today. If I could be permitted a personal digression, I think the members would be encouraged to know that Mr. Mason is very close to his PhD. The Central Alberta Association of the Deaf, in correspondence from Jeff Nakaska, vice-president. The Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, whose president, Charmaine Muise, conveyed to me the request that I convey to you that association's endorsement of what we're doing. In addition to those associations' support and endorsements, Mr. Speaker, I have received a virtual suitcase full of letters from individual deaf people across the land. I have selected some of the more dramatic, and I'd be more than happy to share them on another occasion.

Now, I'm really interested today, Mr. Speaker, in allowing and providing enough time for a good number of government and opposition members to participate, so I'm not going to dwell at length on what's happening at the Alberta School for the Deaf and the Department of Education. But let me say that after many years of lying in the shadow of English-based communication systems, ASL is now gathering the support that it needs to become a viable option for instructing deaf students. One of the indicators of that progress is the fact that the Manitoba Legislature in recent times has approved a similar motion. I might mention also that the Ontario Legislature now has at committee, having unanimously passed through second reading a Bill that implements much of the same thrust as the resolution before us today. In addition to these initiatives, there's been a prolifera-

tion of sign language books and courses, an increase in ASL-related research, a greater proportion of interpreters who have at least basic ASL skills, the training of preservice teachers of the deaf in ASL skills, the development of a sign language dictionary that includes ASL, and mass media recognition, at long last, of ASL as the language of the deaf community. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that in the United States several states have now recognized ASL as a language. These include California, Maine, Michigan, Texas, and Massachusetts. Other states, such as Illinois, Kansas, and Ohio, are currently in the process of considering a Bill to recognize ASL.

As I mentioned, I won't take time today to elaborate on the ASL developments at the School for the Deaf and, indeed, in the Department of Education, but here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, I do want to make the point that much progress has been made. As one measure of that progress I'd like to quote Gary Malkowski, a vocational rehabilitation counselor in Ontario with the Community and Social Services ministry. That gentleman chairs a task force that's looking into the inadequacies of deaf education in Ontario. In the course of his review he came to the conclusion, and I quote his words: "Alberta's way ahead of us, and almost [ahead of] everybody else in the country for that matter."

Lest there be any complacency, however, in the Department of Education or in the government of Alberta, let me indicate to you that there are a great many deaf-related initiatives that await impatiently our resolve and our action. To give you one or two examples of the kinds of needs they face, some of the members may have caught the short item with an Ottawa dateline of June 13:

Thousands of Canada's 270,000 deaf citizens couldn't vote in the last federal election because they couldn't hear enumerators knocking at their doors. James Roots, spokesman for the Canadian Association of the Deaf, recommended changes to a royal commission on electoral reforms. These included deaf phone devices in electoral offices.

A second example of an initiative or a set of initiatives that awaits our action: time and time again I am told by the deaf community leaders that procedures whereby the deaf can have a more direct role in the development of educational and other government policies that profoundly impact their lives is what they are seeking.

I would now welcome comments from both sides of the House on this important motion. I know that deaf Albertans from one end of Alberta to the other will be keenly interested in the views of their legislators. If at all possible, Mr. Speaker, I hope I might be given a minute or two at the end of the hour to make some brief concluding remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you. It's a privilege to rise and speak to this motion today and to welcome our visitors to this debate on language in a place where language is what we're all about. I'm happy to see that we are recognizing the needs of these children and of deaf people. I'm reminded of when I was first elected, being invited to the graduation of the School for the Deaf and being in the presence of *O Canada* being sung and signed at the same time. It was indeed a powerful experience.

In speaking to this motion, I would first address the issue of the importance of having language, for it is in the language process – that is, of giving names to our experience – that we

express our true humanity. It joins together our intellectual and our emotional experiences and allows us to step back from the stream of experiences and consciousness to fix some of those experiences and to reflect on them. That is the essential characteristic of our humanity, in that it allows us to think about the past and to think about the future and to think about change. More importantly, language allows us to encode our thoughts and to communicate with others so we in fact can share our experience in the world and come to understand and know our common humanity.

Language and the language system, whether it is spoken or signed or written, encodes values and is a way of structuring and understanding our world, so a language system is complete and whole in and of itself. It has very much an impact on how the people that use that language are in the world. It is also the vehicle of education. Indeed, it is the very process of education, of socialization, and of enculturation, for it is through the learning of our language that we learn of the shared values and experiences that we have had through time as a people.

When I saw this motion and reflected upon it, I remembered when I took my teacher training more than 30 years ago. There was a great debate on then as to whether children should be taught to sign or forced to learn to lip-read and speak, although learning to speak was very difficult because speaking in fact involves imitation of what is heard. So many children, because many people came down on the side of lipreading, were denied language. I was reminded again of this debate when I started teaching a course at the university on language and cognition and at that time did in fact meet Dr. Carver. I learned a great deal from him about ASL, language, and the deaf community as a community and a culture as other communities and cultures are, with their own experiences and their own way of being in the world. I heard again of people being denied language and the ability to communicate with others and all that that implies.

I think what was at the central core of the debate of the '50s was that there was a tendency to try to normalize or make the deaf like other people. That in some very real way was an insult, an assault to their essential humanity, for it said that you must be different from what you are to be acceptable. Instead, today we embrace a different way of being in the world and I think are enriched by that. This needs to be applauded. I don't know if this debate still carries on as to whether sign language should be taught to all children, but I certainly hope it does not, that it has been finally resolved. Because if, in fact, children are denied sign language, then they are denied the right to learn a language at a time when other children are learning languages and are coming into communicating with their world. The kind of intellectual deficits that have been demonstrated through a delay in the learning of language are of great concern. So I welcome this initiative in that it addresses and makes very clear how important language is, and that one learns to speak one's own language and then the learning of a second or third language is easier because one has the understanding of a symbolic form, which is what language is.

I think a second debate still continues, and that is as to whether deaf children are to be mainstreamed and to have special placement. Again I think what we have to recognize in this is that parents and their children must have choices, but more importantly, that we embrace people as they are and that we don't try to turn them into people like ourselves, so that people have choices to come to their full potential in the way that best serves them.

So I would stand in my place in support of this motion and certainly hope that other people will also.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Three Hills.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a privilege for me today to participate in support of this motion and to say to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that all of us should be very grateful that you brought this forward, because so often there are groups of people in our society who do not pressure us, necessarily, for change but where indeed change is certainly required. I'm pleased to note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore is supporting the motion as well.

Mr. Speaker, I've certainly had occasion in my own constituency to become acquainted with some of the needs of the deaf and hearing impaired people and to only just scratch the surface in my own understanding of their particular situation. I'm so pleased, although I can't see them, to know that we have a number of visitors in the gallery today who will be able to understand to some degree how the Legislature works, how private members' day works, and that indeed in our democratic system an individual member of the Legislature can bring concerns forward and have them dealt with in this manner.

Mr. Speaker, again back to my constituency, I'm privileged to have a fellow from Airdrie, Lorne Webber, who is right at this moment president of the group that handles the deaf and hard-of-hearing services in Calgary. Lorne quite frequently drops by my office and explains some of the materials that he is attempting to develop in order to assist this constituency of people. It is through him and others that I have become somewhat acquainted with what their needs are, but wouldn't pretend to stand in my place and fully express, I'm sure, what their desires are.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that the debate in terms of the use of American Sign Language has gone on for some period of time, and as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has mentioned, that indeed Manitoba has been the first Legislature to officially recognize the use of American Sign Language. I'm certainly hopeful that our Legislature will soon be immediately behind them.

I think it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the United Nations, as I understand it, have passed a resolution which reads in part that every individual has a right to receive information and education in their native language. Surely we are talking here about deaf people's native language. As I understand it, without the recognition that we need to give American Sign Language, it's not officially recognized in the school system. So we have a younger generation that is now far more able, with our assistance, to participate in furthering their education, but if we force them only into one area of language, indeed we deny their ability to become bilingual, if that's a good term to use in this instance. In fact, if the older generation has used American Sign Language, how on earth can we deny a younger generation their ability to communicate across the span of time? Because one of the riches that always is brought to our society is the ability of the young children to be able to sit at the knee or sit at the feet of the older generation and hear from them, or be signed I guess, to pass information along about their history and their experiences. So from my perspective, as little as I may understand, it would be incredibly important for them to be able to bridge that language gap.

Mr. Speaker, I did a little bit of reading, and I think all of us could have some understanding about what the frustrations of being unable to fully communicate would be. We've seen it in our children when they're small, they're learning to speak, and they are trying to tell us something. I mean, it can end up in a

tantrum. As our youngsters grow up who are deaf or hearing impaired, imagine their frustration at not being able to communicate in their own community and with others. I think it is important to note from the reading that I did that there is the downside and the thing that maybe we don't like to speak about but I think it's important to mention: that so many people who have psychiatric and psychological problems that are hearing impaired or deaf can relate back exactly to the frustration as youngsters at not being able to communicate. So there are all sorts of syndromes that are manifested from that time, and the clinical evidence is there.

We have role models today in the deaf community that are absolutely wonderful, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has mentioned someone who is now working on their PhD. Well, abounding in our society are people who have achieved the ultimate in education in terms of what it is they desire to achieve. They are role models for the younger generation. So if my phrase of having young people be bilingual is apt, then surely, Mr. Speaker, it is these role models that will have our younger generation see what can be achieved. I think the onus is on us to put the tools in their hands for that achievement. It isn't just an academic achievement; it isn't just a matter of earning a better living. If you will, it is that complete expression of oneself. Again I felt moved when the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was explaining the kinds of things he felt: the church service and that he realized how much that expression meant to his mother. Surely we're talking about so many people's mothers and the entire community.

So, Mr. Speaker, I leave you with those impressions today that I have of the need that is there for this special community. While I'm not one that is given to speaking about rights, because so often people claim rights when in fact they have absolutely no desire to claim the responsibilities that go with them, indeed this community has rights. Certainly we can leave the message with all of them that they are legitimate rights, legitimate concerns that are being expressed, that they are valued members of our community. I would think, as with the Manitoba Legislature, where it was unanimous, that if all hon. members could be unanimous in support of this motion so ably brought forward and described by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, we would be saying to that community that we support you in absolutely every fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing more of that support. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I personally welcome, as well, our special guests who are in the gallery this afternoon. I would like to begin my remarks by actually making a confession and an apology to members of the deaf community. When I began to teach school at St. Anthony's in Calgary about 1958, I hadn't had any training in recognizing any symptoms that a deaf person might have. I had a little boy in my grade 1 class. It took me till November to realize what his problem was, and in the meantime I think I treated him very unfairly, sometimes cruelly, thinking, as we did then when we didn't recognize disabilities, that he was lazy, he was dumb, he was unwilling to take part, he was shy, and so on. I remember being very, very sad and sorry, when finally he was able to get proper testing and the diagnosis was made, for the way in which I had treated him and, unfortunately, his parents, other children in the school, and some of the other teachers as well had treated him. So I'm very,

very happy today to be able to support this motion, which indicates how much understanding, how much sensitization has taken place in the last 30 years.

I support Motion 216 because it will give formal recognition to "American Sign Language as a language of the deaf and will incorporate it into [our] grade school and postsecondary curriculum as an available language of instruction." I was also further sensitized, I must say, to American Sign Language's need to be recognized as a language in our society when a group of people recognizing the American Sign Language community made a presentation to the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding some five years ago. I was sensitized at that time to the frustrations of people in the deaf community at not being able to communicate, at not being able to express themselves fully in our society, and also the frustration of not receiving the understanding and the sensitivity required from hearing people in our society. To prepare for this commentary, we spoke with Yvone Walmsley, the head of the interpreter program at Grant MacEwan College, and she gave us the background on ASL as the language of the deaf and that ASL provides the hearing impaired with a tool for communication within the deaf community. She explained to us that ASL has a 200-year history of serving the deaf and as such has evolved into an important and vital component of the cultural identity of the community.

I understand that in the past there were a number of issues surrounding ASL, and some of these issues came about because a majority of deaf children have hearing parents who wished their children to learn English, thinking that this is their first language and that in order to cope and to relate with the hearing world, they must learn English and sometimes English only. Thank goodness that fear, that controversy, is dissipating, and many in our society now – many parents, many children of deaf people – understand that the issue boils down to one of bilingualism, ASL plus English or whatever the second language might be. Research has proven conclusively that most deaf children can effectively and successfully become bilingual.

Incidentally, I think it is great to note, and I believe the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek did refer to it, that the theme of bilingualism and biculturalism has now been incorporated into the school curriculum at the Alberta School for the Deaf. I also know, Mr. Speaker, that the deaf community strongly supports the notion of bilingualism and that officially recognizing ASL in the school system will be an important step in affirming the reality of the culture and language of the deaf. However, I also want to note that while we should consider ASL to be an appropriate language of instruction for deaf children, we must also stress the concept of a bilingual and bicultural world of the deaf and never allow it to become an either/or situation. There must be choice, and the choice must be ASL plus another language, whatever that second language might be.

Our researcher spoke to Dave Mason, whom I believe is in the gallery, and he gave her some very interesting background and, of course, a strong indication of the need for our caucus to support this motion. Mr. Mason said: all for the motion; it will mean a lot to deaf people; it will help hearing people to understand that deaf people function as well as anyone with the sign language as those with the spoken language. Mr. Mason also gave us history going back to the 1880 Milan conference, where a resolution was passed that speech would be superior to sign language. Of course, the situation has evolved since then, and I believe that is all to the good.

I would just also like to indicate that I have talked to some superintendents and supervisors of special education programs in some of Alberta's school systems, and they feel that this is a

very worthwhile motion, that it will help students who are attempting to integrate into the regular system to communicate. All in all, it will be a very positive motion and one which our caucus is very happy, as I said earlier, to support.

What the motion heralds, as Mr. Dave Mason has said, is a renaissance of the deaf. Perhaps it is a renaissance that is 400 years old, but it means that the deaf will now have more freedom and that there will be more understanding on the part of those of us who are hearing for the deaf. The deaf will no longer be considered disabled but only different, with a hearing deficiency only.

I thank you for the opportunity to share my views, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forth this motion.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm indeed honoured, along with my colleagues, to address this important motion brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I recall many occasions where the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has certainly helped me out a great deal with my constituents from Calgary-Glenmore, particularly Neil Marshall. I think it's important that we mention Neil's name here, because he certainly has been an initial contributor to ASL. He's a young man who has received a university education in the States and has certainly needed the American Sign Language. I want to thank you, hon. member, for coming to my constituency office and helping be the interpreter for Neil the day he couldn't get one. I'm very grateful for that, and when I witnessed you doing this, it was certainly with envy.

I would like to welcome the deaf community here in the Assembly today, and I think it's a great welcome. The interpreter there: I hope she's using the American Sign Language while she is interpreting to the deaf, and I hope she won't tire before we're finished by 5:30.

I really feel that this is significant timing, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Again, I would like to bring forward an example last month where we had a joint town hall meeting with the hon. Minister of Education, MLA for Calgary-Shaw, and Neil was there with two interpreters, and he wanted to learn about The Rainbow Report. I think that was very touching for all of our constituents that witnessed that, and you, hon. member, had to help out the interpreter because she wasn't using ASL. I felt very touched by that as well, and many other constituents of mine expressed that they were indeed touched too.

I know that there has been a great debate in the deaf community in Calgary in particular with regards to this sign language. I was fortunate enough to be invited and attended a seminar in Calgary at the deaf centre. Their guest speaker was a person from Manitoba who was talking about their legislation and the use of ASL in Manitoba, and they have legislated that language. It was also very touching. Again, the deaf community gave me a lot of insight as to the importance of this sign language, but I know that there's still a considerable amount of debate, so I like the way the hon. member put it, that it's an opportunity to be able to recognize all sign languages and recognize them officially. I would expect, at least in Calgary, that there hasn't been any controversy with regards to that. It's not the case, it is important to emphasize, that we're replacing the English language with ASL. It's not the intent, I'm sure, of this motion to do that, but I feel that the option of having many

choices is certainly open. I think children should be taught this right from infancy and be prepared to use all of these languages, particularly now where the world is becoming smaller and people are traveling and the deaf community have access to all kinds of communications systems. I think it's important that they are familiar with all kinds of sign language, this one being probably the most universal.

The second element of this motion is to incorporate the American Sign Language system into the Alberta grade school and postsecondary curriculum. I had another constituent who is attending the Alberta vocational school in Calgary who also expressed a desire that this be done, that the American Sign Language be introduced at that level in the Alberta vocational school. The rationale behind these initiatives stems from the recognition, of course, that for the most part American Sign Language has become, as I already mentioned, a universal language. At the same time, the system does provide students with a method of communication that allows them to express relatively complex concepts and thoughts with ease. I recall witnessing you, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, when that interpreter had some trouble; you were able to come in with the ASL. I think perhaps this member might take the time and try and learn the language myself.

I think, too, just speaking to educators, many of them, particularly at the postsecondary level, would accept the fact that one of the most important aspects of a child's development is the ability to communicate and in turn interpret abstract concepts and ideas about the world around them. With the exposure of the education for deaf children moving into the secondary level, they have to be exposed to every language in every system provided to them. Yet, Mr. Speaker, as it stands today across the great country, a country with the highest educational standards in the world, deaf school-age children are taught to read, write, and sign with only one language, English or French, in our way of speaking. I think it is a shame that more provinces aren't taking this initiative. I do not want to create the impression that I think current signing systems are inadequate by any means. Over the years a large number of deaf people have been educated under the system and have done well by it, but there's always room for change and improvement. We must acknowledge, as any linguistics specialist would advise us, that no one language, or no one system of signing in this case, is perfect. They all have their limitations, and that's for sure.

Mr. Speaker, ASL, from what I understand, is not a replacement for English or French signing. It's just a supplement to it, and I emphasize that. I think we should all realize that we can enrich the educational experience of a deaf child by helping them to have access in their classroom to a signing system which they already know and use on a daily basis outside the classroom, and more and more people, I think, are becoming more familiar with signing. I think we here should all open the windows of that classroom and let the fresh and invigorating winds of change bring in a new educational opportunity to Alberta's deaf community.

Mr. Speaker, I hope, and I've witnessed already, that all parties do agree that we recognize ASL as an official language in this legislation, and I would hope that we do see the passing of this motion, 216. I am looking forward to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in summing up, and hopefully we will all rise to pass this. For the deaf community this debate today, I believe, strongly represents a very long-awaited recognition of their special needs insofar as their educational options are concerned. With the passing of this motion, we are opening new

doors for the future of the deaf in our society which will allow them to communicate more effectively and broaden their horizons of academic learning.

Mr. Speaker, we already know that the American Sign Language is the preferred signing system, as I've already mentioned, and I don't think we can emphasize it enough. It is not just a language and communication but also brings the artistic, musical, dramatic, poetic, and cultural expressions as well, a language of the soul and the heart. In other ways it provides the deaf student with the opportunity, again, to convey his or her own individuality, their personal feelings and emotions or interpretations, inasmuch as their vibrance and expressive form is possible through the signing. I've witnessed that myself, and again I wish I could understand it.

It's not to say for one moment that we are substituting, but we are adding. With that I express my sincere gratitude and thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just take a couple of minutes here. I recognize there are a number of other people who may wish to speak. I'll begin by saying that I would hope that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the opportunity to sum up on this motion fairly shortly to allow all of us the opportunity to express our support for it. I think it's only fitting that he be given that opportunity, as he is the member who has brought the motion forward. I would hope that we don't find ourselves in the situation that we talk out the clock, and we see debate adjourning at 5:30. I think it's very important that any other members who may wish to speak keep their remarks relatively short to allow us to get a positive vote, positive results on this motion on the record.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

I've just got to speak very briefly, Mr. Speaker, on the point of view of what I'll call the consumer. There are many significant events that have occurred in my 27 years now as a person with a disability, a different disability from the disability that the persons in the public gallery have; nevertheless, I do regard myself as a disadvantaged person from the same point of view. I can look, for example, at the Rick Hansen marathon, where we saw a great deal of attention focused on persons with disabilities, particularly those persons in wheelchairs.

However, I can also go back to 1981, which was the International Year of Disabled Persons. I had the honour of being the co-chairperson of the Canadian organizing committee of the International Year of Disabled Persons. This committee had representation from persons with disabilities throughout the country and represented persons with different types of disabilities. One of those persons – and that was the first occasion that I really had the opportunity to get to know the gentleman – was Roger Carver. I'm not sure if Roger is up there in the public gallery today. No, I don't imagine he is. I can't see him. Nevertheless, he pointed out to me at that particular time, and he has continued to point out to me, some of the problems that persons with hearing disabilities encounter, problems that are so different from the types of problems that I may encounter as a person with a disability. I think the important thing, and what has happened here, is that consumers, those persons that are affected by a decision-making process, have an opportunity to feed into it. They're telling us that this is what they want, and,

Mr. Speaker, that's the way it should be. We as legislators have a responsibility to listen to those people that are being affected by those decisions and to do what they feel should be done on their behalf, because we're placed in this particular position with that power, with that authority to be able to do those things on behalf of those people that elect us to these positions of decision-making authority.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude, but before I do, I too just want to join my colleagues in welcoming the members in the public gallery that made a point of coming here today. Again, I want to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for taking the initiative, for having this motion brought before us. I thank the members for the opportunity of being to say a few words today.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to tell the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that I support his motion. I would like to also welcome the people that have come to the gallery. I had occasion twice in the last couple of years to go out to the School for the Deaf for their graduation ceremony. The last time was just a couple of weeks ago, and I would like to thank them for their hospitality.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek makes a powerful case, and far be it from me to argue the pros and cons of something that he knows more about than I do, so obviously one will support this resolution on the assumption that a number of people and groups have supported the idea. But I wanted to say that the part of his introductory speech which impressed me most was the idea that each of us has to learn our first language well – or at least it is important and helpful to learn our first language well – before we try to branch out into other languages. I think perhaps while that is very clearly true in the case that he made and it certainly sounds right, we should also think about how that applies to all kinds of languages. I think of people that have French as their first language, and somehow we think that they should learn English if they live in our society. Or we think people whose first language is Cree should somehow learn English so they can speak to us. We think of people who are Vietnamese; what's the matter with them that they don't speak English? Whether their language is Hindi or Persian or Spanish or English or whatever the first language might be, if we each stopped to think, "Okay, let them be comfortable in their first language, and let them use that as their main tool for communicating," then we might have more tolerance when they don't speak our language, which may be different as well. Perhaps we would all be a little more tolerant of each other in this society.

The last point I wish to make is that I don't think there's any doubt that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek will get unanimous support for this motion, but what I say to the government is that it's up to them to do something about it. I guess what I'm wondering is: why is this motion brought forward as a private member's motion⁹ Why isn't it a government motion, or why isn't there a government Bill, or why isn't there something that the government has done about this? I certainly hope there is something that they are going to do about this.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite delighted to rise today to speak in support of the motion that's been put forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I guess, somewhat like the story that was told by the Member for Calgary-North West,

although not as a teacher but as a rather new Minister of Education . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: McKnight; I'm sorry.

As a new Minister of Education I, too, had an opportunity to learn that as the Minister of Education it was my honour and my responsibility to kind of be the board of education for the Alberta School for the Deaf. I can tell you that as I look back on the time that I spent in the Department of Education as the Minister of Education, the insights that I gained through my association with the School for the Deaf and members of the deaf community are probably some of my fondest memories. Like the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, whose quavering voice I appreciated in this Assembly – I think we all can get that way when it comes to realizing how fortunate so many of us are with respect to the support that we have for all of our physical and mental abilities and realizing the difficulty that some people have with respect to something as simple and something that we take as much for granted as communication. Like the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, my memory is of attending graduation ceremonies for the School for the Deaf, which was a real honour for me. I, too, got a little weak in the knees and in the voice when I saw *O Canada* being sung in sign. It was quite overwhelming.

I would simply like to tell the members of the community who are here today that I welcome them, as we all do – I wish I could give them all a hug because many of them have hugged me at times when it was pretty tough – to tell them that whatever this province can do, whatever the government can do in support of better communication amongst all members of our province, in support of the issue of tolerance and understanding across our province, certainly the deaf community is a very, very vital part of that communication process.

So, if I may, I simply join in the support that's been expressed right across the House for a very important resolution and applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his foresight, for his commitment, and, frankly, for his diligence in ensuring that the recognition of the deaf within the education community was a high priority of government and the Education department. I say thank you to him as a former minister and thank you as a member of this Legislature for bringing the motion forward.

MR. SPEAKER: Call for the question.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Fish Creek, in summation.

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank our special guests in the public gallery. It's been a warm and fulfilling experience to watch them in the public gallery as they participated in this democratic process today, and I thank them for being here.

Secondly, I'd like to make sure that the members of the Assembly understand that there are literally hundreds of deaf people throughout the province who would like to be here but simply can't. Many of them are at the bottom end of the socioeconomic scale, in occupations and jobs that simply don't give them the independence that so many of us take for granted, and a number of those have communicated with me in recent days to let me know and, through me, to let you know that they are here in spirit, if not here in body.

I would like to thank the government MLAs and the Liberal and New Democratic Party MLAs who have participated in the discussion today and who have expressed support for this resolution. I realize that simply because of our time constraints many MLAs on both sides of the Assembly couldn't get into the debate today, and I would like to thank all those who have not, because I know that they, too, are supportive of this motion. They have expressed that support in various ways in recent days, and for that I am grateful.

A special thanks to our two sign language interpreters, who faithfully for the past hour have interpreted, as near as I could tell, every word that has transpired in this Assembly.

Now, I know that all the members of the Assembly sense what a historic day this has been for our deaf citizens, and I now move that Motion 216 be passed by the Assembly. [applause]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, together with some keen support from his mother and his father, moves Motion 216. Those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries, let the record show, unanimously.

Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon has been a particularly important afternoon to many members, and I think it would be the wish of the government that we call this a day. I would advise members of the House that tonight's business will deal with second and third readings on the Order Paper. So that members may remember this as a special day, as has been pointed out by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, I would move that we now call it 5:30.

[The House recessed at 5:23 p.m.]

