

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 17, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/03/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Top of the afternoon to you all.

Let us pray.

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

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but it appears that my visitors have not yet arrived, so perhaps we could revert to Introduction of Visitors when they arrive.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present an SOS petition signed by 132 Edmontonians urging the government

to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an SOS petition to submit from 107 Albertans from around Edmonton and the greater Edmonton area.

The undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this afternoon to rise and submit petitions on behalf of 132 Albertans from Lethbridge, Calgary, Okotoks, some other places in southern Alberta. They are requesting the Legislative Assembly

to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

Mr. Speaker, this brings the total to 3,421 persons who have signed this petition.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday I met with representatives of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. They asked me to table the following eight letters in the Legislature, and I'm doing so today.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table letters from concerned parents at the Ormsby school in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung with respect to the future of public education in Alberta.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a document from the Premier in which he indicates a revamping of the appointment policy to provide for a fair and open process.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two tablings. The first is two letters, one from Staff Sergeant Trevor Ferguson of the Spruce Grove Community Policing Municipal Committee, and the second one is from the Stettler & County Community Advisory Committee urging the minister of transportation to put in the law on not riding in the back of pickups in the new Traffic Safety Act.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter dated December 14, 1998, from you to all the Members of the Legislative Assembly indicating guidelines for submitting petitions, and it is:

To assist you and your constituents, please find enclosed the document "Guidelines for Presenting Petitions to the Legislative Assembly."

And the guidelines are included so that the Premier understands the process involved with petitions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings to make. One is a copy of a letter from two of my constituents that they sent to the Premier of the province. The letter requests that the Premier not "build 'legislative fences' that exclude same-sex couples from the legal benefits that heterosexual couples enjoy."

The second set of tablings is five letters that the New Democrat office has received, and this is among dozens and dozens of letters. I've simply five samples of it. They come from Albertans all the way from Nanton, Claresholm, Mayerthorpe, and Edmonton. In all of these letters Albertans urge the Premier not to discriminate against gay and lesbian couples when it comes to Bill 20 and Bill 12.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I wish to table copies of a revised Bill 12, Domestic Relations Amendment Act, 1999, with proposed Liberal amendments. This corrects a typographical error I noticed in sessional paper 249/99. The Liberal amendments are in bright colours for the Premier's ease of reference at his March 18 caucus meeting.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is from the Alberta Pine Shake Homeowners Association, and it outlines their interest in organizing a meeting in the Calgary area for affected homeowners with untreated pine shake.

The second tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Bauni Mackay, the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, to the Hon. Murray Smith, and it is outlining the grave concerns and reservations that her organization has regarding the appointment of Mr. Steve Kushner to the Labour Relations Board.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table with the Assembly five copies of a one-page report which shows on half of the page the cover of the Alberta Liberal fiscal plan produced in 1997 called A Balanced Approach, and on the other side the cover of Budget '99 from the government saying The Right Balance. This report demonstrates that the government at least got the cover page right. We have some helpful ideas for the rest of their budget.

MR. DICKSON: One further tabling, Mr. Speaker, and it's this: copies of correspondence to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore requesting that he withdraw a reasoned amendment to ensure that Bill 37 or its successor cannot come back into this Assembly.

Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to file with the Assembly today five copies of a document prepared by the New Democrat opposition and, I might add, refined very well by our research director, John Kolkman, representing the view of the New Democrat opposition as well as our party entitled Equality for All: A Position Paper on Same-Sex Issues. I will send a special copy over for the Premier.

Thanks.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Roberto Nigido, Italy's ambassador to Canada. The ambassador is accompanied by Mr. Rodolfo Buonavita, the newly appointed consul general of Italy based in Vancouver; Mr. Pierfrancesco De Cerchio, Italy's vice consul to Alberta posted here in Edmonton; and Mr. Piero Tarantelli, the trade commissioner for Italy and Toronto. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome His Excellency on his first official visit to Alberta since his appointment last November.

Italy is Alberta's 12th largest export market, and our trade relationship is highly complimentary, consisting primarily of exports such as agricultural and forestry products and imports like fine consumer products and wine. I had the opportunity to meet with His Excellency this morning, and we discussed the interest that many of his countrymen have for aboriginal tourism and aboriginal products as well, so I was very pleased to hear that. We look forward to continuing our strong relationship with Italy, and we anticipate that this visit will create opportunities for both regions. I should note that our own University of Alberta in Edmonton has a relationship with the city of Cortona and the university there and has an exchange program operating as we speak.

1:40

I'd ask the ambassador and his party to rise in the gallery and receive the recognition and the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure and a privilege to introduce to you and through you a group of 23 cadets and 7 adults from the 258 Little Giant Air Cadets from Bonanza, Alberta, and that's just on the B.C. border, if you don't know. As I said earlier, they are accompanied by Captain Eric Hjalmarson, Captain Astrid Minnick, CI Alana Kazmer, CI Carl Hampton, Corporal Scott Jones, Jennifer Neish, and Mrs. Meggie Bridgewater. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 32 constituents of mine, two from the village of Cremona and 30 from the town of Didsbury. Didsbury is co-hosting with the town of Olds the 1999 Alberta Seniors Games, July 25 through July 28, and many of the group that you see here today are involved as volunteers in those games. We wish them the greatest success in that endeavour. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to now stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister of science, research, and information technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you Mr. Murray Haubrich. Murray is the CEO of the Community Credit Union in Medicine Hat. They have assets of over \$170 million and growing rapidly. We don't often get visits from Medicine Hat, so we're pleased to have Murray here today. I'd ask Murray to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you Mr. Denzil Dixon, a constituent who is here to observe question period. I would like to ask Denzil to please stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a young woman whose name is Sarah Hipkiss. She is seated in the members' gallery, and she is a grade 9 student at Nellie McClung school. She is here today, and I had the honour of meeting with her just prior to our session this afternoon. I would ask her to remain standing while she receives the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

#### Student Health Initiative

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The \$25 million student health initiative announced this morning works out to about \$350 per child per year, or \$29 per child per month. The four ministers assembled to make the announcement earlier today were unable to say exactly what extra direct services would be there for children.

As each of the local service plans will have to be vetted through the departments of Health, Education, Social Services, and the children's secretariat after co-ordination, planning, and monitoring by 17 health authorities, 18 child welfare regions, and 74 education authorities, just how much of this \$350 per child per year is actually going to be left for direct services to children?

MR. KLEIN: I assume that question was to me, Mr. Speaker, but what I'll do is have the four ministers involved answer in the order that they were mentioned.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've taken a great deal of care in looking at this particular issue of co-ordination of children's services for some time. In looking at the reviews that have been done by the Alberta School Boards Association, by our own review, by the blue-ribbon panel of the Alberta Teachers' Association, there were a number of points that have come out in our research on the issue of provision of health services for children.

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, those groups indicated that it was very important that we co-ordinate our services, that there has been historically some overlap in the provision of health services for students. Secondly, they also indicated that they required more money, and all of this \$25.6 million, which is a significant amount of money, will be applied for this. It's new money.

Mr. Speaker, I want people to know, particularly the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the existing programs that are in place now, the dollars that have been set aside for those existing programs to deal with student health needs will be continued. Now, the iterations of how those programs come out may be different, but the numbers of dollars that we spend in those areas will be continued.

So, Mr. Speaker, we think by working with the local authorities we can co-ordinate and we can make sure that the most, the maximum amount of money will be directed to the service and not towards the administration and specifically not to provide overlapping services among and between service providers.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, while this is being administered at the local level, what guarantees can the government provide that there will be equality of access to and delivery of student health services right across the province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, you know, that's something that we're obviously concerned about. We want to make sure that there will be equality and equity of service provided throughout the province. The way the money is being set aside is that we've asked school boards for the information on the numbers of kids that have student health needs, and by the last estimation provided by school boards – and they do keep very good records on these matters – there is an estimated 73,000 students who have student health needs.

Mr. Speaker, the needs of these kids to deal with their health is absolutely critical so that they can in fact learn in schools, so we are directing this money towards that. It will be allocated on the basis of the numbers of students that are identified by jurisdictions, so they will receive a corresponding amount of money that will correspond with the numbers of students that they have to deal with.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that school boards already have their administrative budgets capped, what resources are available to them to administer this new initiative?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that it is important to cap administration costs, and it is important to recognize that administration dollars are required for the delivery of

programs. Of course, what we've done in our budget is – as the numbers of students have increased, there's been a corresponding increase of the administrative dollars that are available. So expressed as a percentage of the numbers of students, the percentage is capped, but the numbers of dollars will go up as the number of students goes up.

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

### Tax Reform

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the province is claiming that its reform tax plan will produce a 40 percent provincial revenue recovery, but several credible studies indicate that revenue recovery from a tax cut is 35 percent at best. How can the Provincial Treasurer justify a 40 percent revenue recovery when the very conservative Kato Institute in the U.S. says that maximum revenue recovery from tax cuts is 35 percent?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we survey all the literature on this, and I personally think it's going to work out to even more than 40 percent. That's my personal thought on it looking at the projections, 40 percent, 35 percent. Forty percent is what we have deemed as conservative after surveying all of the instruments.

You know, it's interesting that the members of the opposition one day will pick the Parkland Institute if that serves their needs; today it's the Kato Institute. I'd be very interested to know if she supports all the research that comes out of the Kato Institute. That would be very fascinating to know.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what studies can the Provincial Treasurer show us that justify a 40 percent revenue recovery when the Dole tax cut of 1996 in the U.S. claimed only a 27 percent recovery?

MR. DAY: Actually the JFK tax cut of 1962 was even more than that. It's a fascinating study, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, what studies can the Provincial Treasurer show that a 40 percent revenue recovery is justified when the Reagan tax recovery, another one of his gurus, claimed a revenue recovery of only 17 percent?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll send all the information to her, and she can see that we took a broad perspective on the survey.

You know, it's been fascinating, Mr. Speaker. Last year all we did was reduce the basic rate from 45.5 percent to 44.0, and already this year we have an increase in personal income tax. Already. We didn't have to wait the three to four years. Was that specifically because of that? It's hard to say, but I can tell you something. There is an amazing coincidence that every jurisdiction that lowers taxes receives more income.

And it's also fascinating that all week long the Liberals have argued against and complained about taxes being reduced. That's been fascinating to watch.

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

### Government Appointments

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Justice minister's

comments recently in the Legislature led many Albertans to examine the government's record on the treatment of women in this province. Women constitute 51 percent of Alberta's population, yet there are zero percent of women MLAs on the government's powerful priorities and agenda committee. As well, there are zero percent of women represented on the Judicial Council. My questions are to the Premier. Does the Premier mean to tell Albertans that of the 14 women in his caucus no one is qualified to sit on the priorities and agenda committee?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to be rude, but really it's none of her business. You know, I don't know who sits on any of their committees or what the mix is, nor do I care. It's entirely the prerogative of the Premier, who decides who's going to be on Treasury Board, and by the way, there are female members of this caucus – and I mean caucus – on Treasury Board. There are female members of this caucus on numerous boards, authorities, committees.

But, Mr. Speaker, they single out one committee – one committee – where apparently there are five permanent members and two alternates, the two alternates being females. I would sort of flip it around and ask the Liberals if they think we are discriminating against men when I point out that with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, a very important quasi-judicial body, yes, the chair is a male, Charlach Mackintosh, and there is one other member, Mr. William Baergen who is a male, but all the other members are female: Lori Andreachuk, Elizabeth Bryant, Diane Colley-Urquhart, Deborah Prowse, Helen Rice. So five out of the seven on this very important commission are female. Are they going to say that that's wrong?

MR. HAVELOCK: The top judge in the province happens to be a female, and she sits on the Judicial Council. Now, I'm quite happy to take the hon. member's opinion to her that she seems to think otherwise, but I don't think Chief Justice Fraser would appreciate the comment or the insinuation.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the Premier. Why have there been no appointments of women to the offices of the Ombudsman, Ethics Commissioner, Privacy Commissioner, or the Children's Advocate?

### **Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, those searches are all conducted by a committee of this Legislative Assembly, not a committee of the government. It's an all-party committee of this Assembly, so it's really not within the administrative jurisdiction of the government.

### **Government Appointments (continued)**

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask, then, as merit is often used as the justification for unequal representation, will the Premier explain to the many qualified women lawyers and judges in this province why they are underrepresented on the bench and why they are not contributing to the representation on the Judicial Council?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General just pointed out that the Chief Justice of this province is a female.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I could put it right back to the Liberals.

I don't recall in all my days sitting in this House, seeing, for instance, a female Treasury critic. I see in our own caucus, the vice-chair of our own Treasury Board is the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills. It's a two-way street.

Well, Mr. Speaker, going back to take one department, the Department of Community Development, there are 103 people appointed to various boards, authorities, committees, commissions, agencies, and so on within that portfolio. I would point out that 48 of the 103 appointees are female, so there's almost a 50-50 split. Is that wrong? Is that wrong? No. I think it's absolutely right. I think it's a good balance.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, we actually recognize in the Justice department that there is some degree of underrepresentation with respect to female members of the bench. That is one of the reasons why the new process will request Judicial Council to look at the issue of gender, and it also requires the new nominating committee to take that into account. So we fully recognize it, but I'd like to reiterate again that despite those qualifications, the bottom line with respect to judicial appointments is that they should be made on the basis of merit, regardless of whether they're a man or a woman.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, I'm sorry. I'd like to supplement, Mr. Speaker. I was prepared to appoint a female as Treasurer when I first became Premier.

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

### **Sexual Orientation**

MS BARRETT: Don't you just hate it when the Premier gets the last word, Mr. Speaker? It was pretty good. I'd have used it too.

MRS. MacBETH: He misses me.

MS BARRETT: He misses you.

Mr. Speaker, a serious subject is coming up for consideration in the government caucus tomorrow, and it would be a very serious subject for any government caucus to be dealing with. That is how to handle the changing issue of same-sex rights. In this case, I'd like to make a pitch that I believe in equality for all, and I know that some of the government members feel that way as well. But I need to ask the Premier: since the Vriend decision, since the government decided to set up a committee to look at possible legislative fences, if his government or that committee undertook any sincere and substantive measures to solicit the opinions of Albertans on this sensitive matter, and particularly those who are most directly affected; that is, same-sex couples.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was polling done, and I believe that that report was released publicly. The results of the polling showed that a slight majority of Albertans of course opposed same-sex marriage per se. It also showed that Albertans were somewhat split. This was scientific polling, I think accurate within 2 or 3 percent, 19 out of 20. It showed that Albertans were virtually split – 47-48, I believe the figure was – on other issues relative to same-sex benefits and other relationships.

2:00

The hon. member is right. It is a difficult issue to deal with and to get a firm handle on the so-called moral compass of Albertans relative to this issue and at the same time respect the rights of all individuals.

I'd like to say at this time, Mr. Speaker, that I do appreciate and I will commend the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition for her thoughtful letter to me, which will be circulated to all members of this caucus, and the hon. leader of the NDs for her statement, which is now being copied and will be circulated to all members of this caucus for their consideration.

MS BARRETT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Premier could identify, though, if any particular stakeholder organizations were contacted and consulted prior to this important meeting tomorrow, and by that I do mean same-sex organizations.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't personally involved in the polling. This was under the direction of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, so I'll have him respond.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Premier. Very early after the task force was established, we did meet with some members of the gay community, for example, to solicit some of their input. At that time we had not yet decided on a process with respect to how we were going to try and determine where Albertans were on the issue.

We need to recognize, as the Premier has pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that this is a controversial issue. It's a highly sensitive issue. We evaluated whether or not we would for example send a committee out to solicit the views of Albertans, and we felt that that wouldn't be the appropriate way to go. We spent a lot of time reviewing decisions from across the country with respect to this issue. Anyone who wished to send us information, certainly we took a look at that. We did receive some; in fact, we're receiving some even up to as recently as today when the tablings took place, and that will all be considered. But I will state that the decision was made: no, let's not go out and do a broad public consultation; let's do some polling because of the sensitivity of the issue. But, again, our doors are always open. If anyone wanted to forward us any information at all, we'd certainly take a look at it.

MS BARRETT: Fair enough, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

My final question relates to a poll conducted by Angus Reid, a Canada-wide poll that I tabled here a few weeks ago, which showed that the vast majority of Canadians do not oppose legally sanctioned rights and obligations for same-sex couples, and I wonder if the Premier will commit to circulating that poll, which I did table in the Chamber a few weeks ago, to all his government members prior to making decisions tomorrow?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I have no problems doing that, and we'll try and make all the information available to members of our caucus at least when they meet tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, as I said it's never an easy issue to deal with. In many cases, in virtually all cases, the moral compass guides us all. Let's hope that our deliberations are the right deliberations and our decisions are the right decisions. No matter what we do, we are not going to satisfy all the people, but we'll try to do the right thing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

### **Tax Reform** (continued)

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Premier. Last week the Provincial Treasurer tabled one of the most widely acclaimed budgets that's been seen in this province or likely

anywhere else in many years. [interjections] They think it's funny. Tax cuts and tax reform certainly played a significant role in this acclaim. Because we were proud of and sincere about implementing, first of all, our deficit elimination and debt retirement plan and then recently our fiscal responsibility plan, we enacted them as legislation in full display to all Albertans. My question to the Premier is: could he tell us if he has any plans to or would he be willing to consider placing the tax reform plan that was announced in last week's budget into legislation to demonstrate our commitment to the people of Alberta and to acknowledge their faith in this government?

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry. Mr. Speaker, I've just been informed by the Provincial Treasurer what the question was. I was sort of anticipating the question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

It was a very interesting question. This is something that personally I favour. I personally favour it. But as you can see, there are probably some others in the caucus who don't favour it. So this is going to have to be a discussion for our caucus, and democracy always prevails.

MR. FRIEDEL: It must be the green shirt I'm wearing today.

My next question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Treasurer. Considering the preamble to my first question and the Premier's comment, I'm wondering if he can tell us if legislation fits into any Treasury plans or his own plans for implementation and follow-through on the tax reform plan.

MR. DAY: In the ongoing spirit of openness I can say that I did have certain plans on that, and having just heard the Premier's response, I will say, as other members have said, that any interest of the Premier's just fascinates the heck out of me, Mr. Speaker.

MR. FRIEDEL: I think the Treasurer's tearing up of his first plan answers my last question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

### **Gaming Research Institute**

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, apparently the minister responsible for lotteries has taken it upon herself to solicit nominations for the Gaming Research Council from government MLAs only. I repeat: from government MLAs only. I am so frustrated and disappointed with the minister's lack of sensitivity to fair play and public participation that I don't even want to direct my questions to her. So, Mr. Premier, do you condone the minister's actions?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the minister's actions were absolutely appropriate. You know, there are literally hundreds of boards, authorities, agencies, and commissions. This is a new one. It's a new initiative emanating from the gaming summit. But it is not our duty to poll opposition members. It is our duty to poll our own members. If the leader of the Liberal opposition wants to poll her members relative to appointments to any of the boards, authorities, commissions, and agencies, that, sir, is her responsibility. It is not our responsibility to poll opposition members.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier rationalize that response with this statement in his press release of October 28, 1993, in which he states, "We want an unbiased view of candidates' qualifications, and a fair and open process" in appointments.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, we do, Mr. Speaker, and we follow that process. I have in my hand – and it's a public document; I don't know if I have to get copies and table it because it's right there. It says: Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions subject to the appointment policy. This is the policy relative to advertising and so on. This is not on the list. It might be down the road.

But, again, I would say that if the Liberals want to nominate someone to the council, then feel free to do so, and there will be some form of adjudication as to who the right people will be.

2:10

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier not realize, though, that the umbrella commission, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, is one of those commissions named?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think there needs to be some clarification on that particular matter. I don't know if in fact that is true, and I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify something. At the gaming summit last year in Medicine Hat one of the recommendations that came out was that the government needed to pay more attention to solid research on gaming activities and the future of gaming. As a result, the Alberta Gaming Research Institute and council was determined to be established. It was announced in the Speech from the Throne and in the budget process. This council will report through two ministers, the Minister of Community Development and myself, and as such we believe it will give us a broad spectrum of drawing in not only the communities but also the economic side so that the socioeconomic side of gaming in our communities can in fact be reflected through research through the institute.

There are two facets to this. First of all there is the actual research institute that will actually do the research to give us some solid background on gaming activities and the impact that it has, because quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we don't have that information. To oversee the activities of the institute, there will be a council of people made up from specific areas, stakeholders, from the ADAAC group, from AGLC, from the aboriginal side, from the youth side, and some from the public at large, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Well, if you want to hear the answer, would you like to listen to it?

We've had people who have contacted us directly and expressed an interest to serve on this council. We also did in fact ask our colleagues if they knew of someone who would be interested in serving on this council. The selection process we will go through in the next few weeks, and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I can say that the Minister of Community Development and myself are looking for the best people to sit on this council because we are determined that this will be a good council. Ultimately the goal is to ensure that we have the best research coming forward that is possible. We would dearly like to see this council put together very quickly and with good people from the community. I think that we have followed a very good process, and we're anxious to see it come together.

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

### Property Taxes

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been speaking to a number of condominium property owners in Edmonton who are concerned about increases in property taxes as a result of the move to market assessments. Increases for condominium owners are in fact expected in the range between 21 to over 100 percent, a huge

increase, to say the least. My questions are all to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister tell this Assembly why it appears that condominium property owners are especially hard-hit?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I'd like to say is that this morning by chance I had a member of the Edmonton community who owns a condominium who confirmed that if his assessment is correct, his taxes will actually go down. Generally, though, condominiums in this community, because of the fact that they're marketing in a more rapid fashion and their property values appear to be rising – of course there will be a situation where you find condominiums that will have an increase in assessment, but that is determined by the assessor based on market value. However, can I suggest as well that market value is the determination of the amount that a property sells for. Taxation, on the other hand, can be relatively revenue neutral. The tax does not increase based on the market value; it increases on the basis of the community's own determination of its revenue needs.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you. Madam Minister, is there anything that the city of Edmonton can do to mitigate this tax increase?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, under section 297(1) of the Municipal Government Act, there is an availability within that category of property – in other words, within that residential classification – to actually defer taxes, to phase them in over a period of time and deal with that category of property within that residential subclassification. I should add as well that the city has already chosen to give those particular hardship cases or people that are having difficulty in Edmonton – they will allow a phase-in period of up to five years.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If a separate mill rate is considered by the city, will this erode the equity of market value assessment?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the legislation itself assures local autonomy in the determination of tax policy. Equity of the assessment base remains unchanged. The city may decide to vary its tax policy, as I've suggested previously, with any different category. Some municipalities commonly have a higher tax rate for commercial properties as opposed to residential properties.

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

### Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government made promises that were supposed to help cash-strapped schools. This week parents and teachers are learning just how empty those promises are. My questions are to the Minister of Education. How much will Alberta pupil to teacher ratios, the highest in the country, fall as an outcome of this funding announcement?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the pupil/teacher ratio will depend on a number of factors, including where salaries come in, but there are no provincially set pupil/teacher ratios. The decisions about pupil/teacher ratios, classroom size more particularly, are dealt with by school boards as a matter of policy. School boards seem to be doing a pretty good job of keeping class sizes smaller for younger students, and then they tend to get larger as the grades go up, until you get into high school,

when, because of the proliferation of options that are made available, pupil/teacher ratios in some classes are very small resulting in larger ones in others.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the dollars that have been allocated to school boards under this budget, it's a pretty significant amount of money. In aggregate it's a 19 percent increase over the next three years, a real increase. On the specific issue of the instructional grants, those grants will go up, as the hon. member knows, by 3 percent starting in September of this year, 2 percent in the year after that, and 2 percent in the year after that, a total in excess of 7 percent over a three-year period.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how many schools and school boards currently in a deficit position will have these deficits eliminated as a result of this funding announcement?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've looked very seriously at the issues of accumulated deficits that school boards have throughout the province of Alberta. The hon. member knows the number of school boards in this province totals 60. Earlier this week in our Legislature a question was asked in question period with respect to accumulated deficits for school boards in the province. Four of them were in a position of having accumulated deficits.

We are concerned about that obviously. We're prepared to work with each and every one of those boards to make sure they have a fiscal plan in place so that all of them can deal with both their operating deficits and accumulated deficits. So we hope that they'll get on the right track of making sure that they do not spend more money than they have.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the funding announcement allow Calgary separate school supporters to heed the bishop of Calgary and stop fund-raising for school basics?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I didn't hear the last part of the question. If I might ask the hon. member to ask again, please.

DR. MASSEY: Will the funding announcement allow Calgary separate school supporters to heed the bishop of Calgary and stop fund-raising for basics?

2:20

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, there should be no school board in this province that is fund-raising for things that we consider to be basics in education. Fund-raising has always been part of the responsibility the parents willingly take on in order to make sure that there are extras available for their sons and daughters that attend schools.

With respect to the policies on fund-raising, individual school boards have taken on that responsibility, and it strikes me that they do so very responsibly. I don't get the sense that there's any need to interfere with fund-raising policies at various school boards. If they are doing that and parents object to it, then it is incumbent upon those parents to bring that to the attention of the trustees that they elected to take care of their school board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, and if the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has not already asked all of her questions, we may recognize.

### Student Health Initiative

(continued)

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On budget day and again further this morning we heard the announcement of \$26 million for the student health initiative. In an answer to an earlier question posed to him in the Legislature today, the Minister of Education indicated that this was simply not funds that had been moved from other departments and agencies into Education for this project and that it was certainly new money for this initiative. My question is to the minister responsible for children's services: how does this new student health initiative fit into the larger Alberta children's initiative?

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much to the member. First of all, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta children's initiative, which I tabled in the Legislature I think last fall, reflects a commitment of six ministries to work together in planning, co-ordinating, and delivering services to children to strengthen communities. The goals of the ACI are to ensure that children will be well cared for, will be safe, will be successful at learning, and will be healthy.

To achieve these goals, interdepartmental initiatives are being developed and implemented to support areas identified as immediate priorities. The student health initiative is one of the four priorities, such as fetal alcohol syndrome, protection of children involved in prostitution, and children's mental health. It is one of the four priorities as identified under the Alberta children's initiative.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is a question to the Minister of Health. Could the minister provide us with some specific examples of how this new initiative might help individual students in the classroom?

MR. JONSON: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. This is a welcome initiative in terms of helping the school system and more particularly the individual student with complex health needs. I could give perhaps a couple of examples to the member. First of all, we have, of course, a very variable school population across this province, and in some schools, particularly those perhaps concentrating on services to students with physical or mental challenges, you might have a situation where while the health care system is there now to provide nursing services, appointments to doctors, and so on on an on-call basis so to speak – it might be very likely that in a situation such as that this money could hire a nurse half-time to be able to be part of the staff of that school, work with the teachers, and provide regular checks on the high-need students in that population with respect to their physical health or, if it's in a mental health area, a mental health nurse to provide help in that particular area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

### Traffic Safety Act

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. I do have a question, Mr. Speaker. The Traffic Safety Act that the government tabled in the Legislature last fall leaves municipalities to decide whether or not a person is allowed to ride in the back of a pickup truck. This will create a patchwork of laws across this province. Community policing advisory committees are telling the government that riding in the back of trucks is hazardous and should be prohibited by law, not left to municipal bylaws. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Will the minister change the Traffic Safety Act before it is reintroduced this session to ban individuals from riding in the box of pickup trucks?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, when Bill 50, the Traffic Safety Act, was tabled last fall, it was indicated at that time that it was a draft piece of legislation. It was tabled with the intent of asking for additional input from stakeholders. There is a massive amount of consultation that has taken place, and it is our hope to capture the results of that consultation from the stakeholders when the legislation is tabled again this spring.

MRS. SOETAERT: So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to urge the minister then: will you please take the advice of experts, including the RCMP, and put this into law?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, we tabled the legislation last fall, just to reiterate what I had just finished saying, with the idea of consulting with Albertans to hear the results from stakeholders, from all Albertans. Every Albertan was asked to have their input relayed to our department. As a result of that, we will be retabulating the Traffic Safety Act this spring reflecting the wishes of Albertans.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, he's avoiding my question, so I'm going to try it from a different angle. Given that we have laws about seat belts when we ride in a truck, I'd really like the answer from you. Are you going to ban riding in the back of a pickup? You've seen all these surveys. You've done your homework, and I'll give you that. But I'd like to know: are you going to ban it?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out that it is our intention to retable the Traffic Safety Act this spring, and at that time we will provide clear definition as to what the recommendations will be.

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

### Health Care Premiums

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week there were some stories here in Edmonton indicating that close to 250,000 Albertans had lost their eligibility for publicly funded health care because they were behind in their payments for health care insurance premiums. This media coverage seemed to imply that these Albertans would be refused treatment by doctors because they no longer had valid health care insurance numbers, so naturally a number of my constituents grew concerned and called me. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, is it possible that thousands of Albertans could in fact be denied medical treatment because they are behind in the payment of their health care insurance premiums?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. Needed health care treatment is provided to all Albertans without reference to the fact that they have or have not kept their premium accounts up to date. If it comes to a case where we are taking action to collect our health care premiums, we do not do that in any way that would jeopardize a person being able to get medically required services, whether it's from a doctor or from a hospital setting in this province.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, we do have quite a large number of people who are in arrears or who we are unable to locate in terms of contacting them for payment or for updating their health care number. This is an ongoing administrative challenge facing the Department of Health.

I do want to repeat that medically required services are not denied Albertans on the basis of not having paid their premiums up to date.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Expanding on that last comment, Mr. Minister, is it possible or is there any way that doctors can or would turn away any of those Albertans who in fact cannot prove eligibility of coverage under the Alberta health care insurance plan?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. If an individual seeks diagnosis and treatment from a physician, that physician is required to provide that medical service, and certainly we provide payment for that service. There are, I would admit, certain delays in terms of locating the person, making sure they are a valid resident, but doctors get paid and patients get treated.

The only situation that I can think of, Mr. Speaker, where a person might go to a physician and be refused help if they did not have the ability to pay would be for an uninsured health care service such as, perhaps, a basic physical examination for purposes of a transport truck licence. In those particular cases, those things are required to be paid for, and that kind of situation might arise.

2:30

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Finally to the same minister. I'm hoping he can explain why it is that Alberta continues to collect health care insurance premiums when it appears that some Albertans simply can't afford to pay these health care premiums?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all in our overall policy with respect to premiums, we do provide exemption from having to pay premiums in this province to I think it's about 250,000 Albertans through coverage under the seniors' benefit and exemptions provided through our policies with respect to social assistance.

Yes, we are one of only two provinces that do charge premiums. The revenue that we take in amounts to about 16 percent of our overall health care budget, and we along with British Columbia have had that charge in place for some time, Mr. Speaker. It is felt, I think, that it does to a degree make people aware of the costs of health care. This particular charge is not merged in the overall taxes of the province, and it is a program that we happen to have in this province to support health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

### Calgary LRT Planning

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On March 4, 1998, when I'd asked the minister of transportation about the severe pressures on transportation and public transit in the city of Calgary, he acknowledged the problem, a problem that's been exacerbated by downloading. In fact, he said, "Calgary is a dynamic growth centre. We're going to work very closely with Calgary . . . every justification for focusing on Calgary . . . greatest growth component in all of Alberta." Why is it, given that acknowledgment a full year ago, that city council in that city is left to wrestle with long-term planning for LRT expansion without predictable long-term funding, without predictable long-term planning?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, indeed there is an acknowledgment of the tremendous growth of the city of Calgary. The pressure of infrastructure, of course, always develops when there is growth. To suggest that there is some negligence – the growth has heartily been recognized by the additional funding that has been coming forward. Just last year, for example, there was an additional \$64 million identified to the north/south corridor as it goes through Calgary. In this particular year there's an additional \$31 million that's been identified as being directed to Calgary from the addi-



tional \$150 million that was brought forward in the new budget. So indeed there has been a substantive recognition of the pressure that's coming forward in Calgary.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think the whole concept of expanding the LRT is one that is recognized as one of the pressure points in the city of Calgary and certainly one where we are quite prepared to sit down with the city of Calgary, as our officials are doing now, and work at bringing forward some form of a solution that will be satisfactory and accommodate the pressures that are there.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question. Since KPMG reported, referring to the injection of money in 1998, that, and I quote, this is equivalent to recovering the reductions in funding that have been in effect for more than the past three years, close quote, how much longer is the city of Calgary going to have to wait for adequate new dollars to be able to do that long-range planning that's required? It takes more than three years planning to build LRT extensions, Mr. Minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with the municipalities, and our process, one that municipalities have accepted and as a matter of fact one the municipalities have asked for, is the authority to do their jurisdictional planning within their jurisdiction. That is the case in Calgary as well. The city of Calgary had a meeting as late as last night to further develop the concept of expanding their LRT, and subsequent to that we will be conducting meetings with the city of Calgary to further develop the plan.

MR. DICKSON: My final question is: how much longer are we going to have to wait in the city of Calgary for the commitment to long-term funding? You talk about meetings. You talked about meetings a year ago, Mr. Minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, the jurisdictional control and the planning for municipalities is within those municipalities. The city is in the process of providing direction as to where the planning should take the needs of the city, and we're quite prepared to work with the city. It is not the objective of this government to tell municipalities how they have to structure their infrastructure. That has never been our plan, and it's certainly not our objective at the present time. The authority is within the municipality, and we will work with whatever municipality has that requirement.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now we'll continue today's Routine with respect to Recognitions. There are seven hon. members who've indicated their intent to provide a recognition today. We'll begin first of all with the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then Calgary-West, then Lethbridge-East, Calgary-Lougheed, Edmonton-Highlands, and Calgary-Cross, but in 30 seconds.

In the interim, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: We'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. It's a

great pleasure for me this afternoon to introduce Dr. Anita Mitzner, the head of the UNA local at the Foothills hospital in Calgary, an absolutely wonderful advocate of a strong, properly financed public health system. I'd invite Dr. Mitzner to stand and receive the warm welcome of members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

### Recognitions

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

#### CIAU Women's Basketball Championship

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate today the athletes, coaches, and training staff of the green-uniformed University of Alberta Pandas, who reached their pot of gold by winning their first CIAU women's basketball championship. Last Sunday the Pandas, lead by head coach Trix Baker, upset the top-ranked Victoria Vikes to win the national title.

It takes a great deal of skill, determination, and perseverance to win a championship trophy, and it also takes heart, qualities this team has in abundance. The Pandas are part of a rich tradition of athletic excellence at the University of Alberta, and as the first women's basketball team to win a national championship, they have set a standard for others to follow.

In 2000-2001 Alberta will be the proud host of the CIAU championships. It will be a delight for Albertans to watch this team defend its title. I know that all members of the Assembly join me in extending their congratulations and best wishes to the University of Alberta women's basketball team.

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

#### International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are reaching the last few days of activities commemorating March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. March 21 was chosen as the day because it marks the anniversary of the Sharpville massacre in South Africa, where police opened fire on hundreds of peaceful demonstrators.

In 1966 the UN declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Canada was the first country to show support by promoting a March 21 campaign starting in 1989.

Activities here are organized by the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations. NAARR is a grassroots coalition of agencies, community groups, and individuals from Edmonton and northern Alberta formed to promote racial harmony through public education of individuals and society at large and to co-ordinate and facilitate activities around March 21.

I urge all members of this Legislative Assembly to participate in an event this weekend, as we all need to be reminded and educated on this important issue.

Thank you.

#### 2:40 Women's Hockey World Championship

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure to rise today to recognize the efforts of the Canadian women's hockey team which skated to its fifth consecutive world championship in Espoo, Finland, this past weekend. Once again all Canadians were very proud to watch these talented women receive their gold medals for their outstanding performance throughout the tournament.

I would like to recognize the four Albertans who are an important part of this team: on defence, Fiona Smith from Edmonton, and forwards Jennifer Botterill, Danielle Goyette, and Hayley Wickenheiser, all from Calgary. Danielle scored the winning goal on a pass from Hayley in Team Canada's 3-1 victory over the United States in the gold medal clinching game.

These Albertans and all of Team Canada thrilled the entire nation with their talent, teamwork, and sportsmanship. These players are very fine role models for all young Canadians. I encourage the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the Canadian women's hockey team, the world champions.

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

### University of Lethbridge

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to rise in the Legislature to recognize the University of Lethbridge and its ongoing activities to link with colleges in providing opportunities for students in our province. Last Friday, in conjunction with the minister of advanced education and the minister of the environment, we attended the Faculty of Arts and Science signing ceremony to formalize their two plus two environmental sciences degree. This event celebrated the ability of students in environmental programs at colleges in B.C., Alberta, and the Northwest Territories, including Nunavut College, which is going to be in our new territory next year, to continue their environmental education at the U of L without losing credits for their college courses. This program follows on the management and fine arts two plus two programs which are in operation with colleges all across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the two plus two programs allow a college student to transfer a two-year diploma to the U of L and, after a special curriculum of courses, graduate with a degree in their subject matter area after two years.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to wish the U of L continued success in providing educational opportunities to the students of Alberta, western Canada, and in fact all students. Keep up the good work, U of L.

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

### Junior Women's Figure Skating Championship

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to recognize an outstanding young Albertan who has brought honour to the province by winning the junior women's gold at the Canadian figure skating championships recently held in Ottawa. Leah Hepner is that outstanding young Albertan. She lives with her family in the Premier's riding of Calgary-Elbow, and she is a grade 12 honour student at Calgary's Western Canada high school.

Leah had made it her year-long goal to return to the Canadian figure skating championships and show that she could win after a disappointing finish last year. Leah began her figure skating career when she was only four years old, and her persistence, dedication, and hard work have certainly paid off. Few of us can comprehend the amount of work it takes to achieve this level of success in both academic and athletic pursuits at the same time.

Following her successful win in Ottawa, she has goals to compete next year in the ladies' championship in Calgary and at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

Congratulations and all the best success for the future.

### Canadian Deaf Curling Championships

MS BARRETT: I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to recognize the Edmonton deaf curling association, who are sponsoring the 21st Canadian

deaf curling championships, March 21 through 27, at the Avonair Curling Club. Best wishes to the teams who have traveled from B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland, Yukon/Territories, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick to Edmonton to participate in this event. And of course best wishes to the Alberta team, who are serving as hosts to all these folks. The announcement for this event contains the line "It's Edmonton: the fun never stops." I wholeheartedly agree and wish them much success and fun in this city that I call Festival City. I wouldn't live elsewhere.

### University of Calgary Citizenship Court

MRS. FRITZ: Mr. Speaker, this coming Monday the University of Calgary will be hosting its first citizenship court ceremony, and this very special celebration will be held in partnership with the Calgary Police Service to recognize March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In commemoration of this day, President Terry White of the University of Calgary said, and I quote: The University of Calgary as a microcosm of the global community is a good example of how students, faculty, and staff can live and work toward a common goal utilizing the principles of tolerance, understanding, respecting our differences, and trying each and every day to live in harmony.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating all those who are being sworn in as new Canadians at this inspiring citizenship court ceremony with special recognition going to two-year-old Katherine Yip Choy Bernard, whose mother, Jennifer Yip Choy, is very proud of her daughter becoming a Canadian citizen.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert on a point of order.

### Point of Order Clarification

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h) and (i). Today during question period I heard the Premier say that the Liberals have never had a female Treasury critic. Well, I know he just had a little lapse of memory, because the former Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, Muriel Abdurrahman, was our Treasury critic for a while. I don't know how he could forget. Shame on him. Shame on him. However, I know it was just a slip of the mind, and I'm sure he'll apologize for that oversight.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: So I gather it's a point of clarification in fact.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 4, 6, 7, 24, 34, 42, 43, 44, and 45.

[Motion carried]

### Winter Highway Maintenance Costs

Q4. Mrs. Soetaert moved that the following question be accepted. How much did the Department of Transportation and Utilities spend in each of the fiscal years 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97,

and 1997-98 for sanding, salting, and the clearance of snow on provincial highways, how much was paid to department staff, and how much was paid to private contractors?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move an amendment to Written Question 4. The amended question would read:

How much did the Department of Transportation and Utilities spend in each of the fiscal years 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98 for primary highway maintenance activities for the winter months, November to March?

Alberta Transportation and Utilities would be pleased to provide this Assembly with a summary of the expenditures on primary highway maintenance. However, the department doesn't maintain the records specific to sanding, salting, and snow deliverance cost. The cost of sanding, salting, and clearing of snow consists of many components. There are, of course, the material costs of the sand and the salt. There are the labour costs, and there are also the equipment costs, and much of the equipment is adapted for different uses throughout the year and is not just for salting, sanding, or snow removal. As a matter of fact, some of it is used year-round, so it's very difficult to be very specific as far as the equipment breakout is concerned. Similarly, other costs relating to maintaining Alberta primary highways, such as rent, power, water, telephone charges, storage yards, maintenance buildings, can't be attributed separately just to sanding, salting, and snow removal.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, if the proposed amendment is accepted, we're prepared to table the maintenance costs for the winter months, which I believe would address the intent of the hon. member's question.

THE SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say that last night a member from the minister's department made sure that I had the information about the amendments, and I very much appreciate that. That level of co-operation within the department of transportation is commendable, and I truly appreciate that.

2:50

One concern I have about the amendment is that it doesn't give a breakdown of private contractors, and maybe you don't keep a record of that. Maybe you're not willing to give that information. I don't know. I would have liked that, if that's a possibility. Maybe you could include it. I do appreciate the information that I'm getting, but a concern I've had out in my constituency is that people are saying: ever since they went to private contracting, this highway isn't cleared, blah, blah, blah. And that's kind of the point. If I can get the information and see if the costs are worth it, see if the present Minister of Energy maybe did some bungling when he was in there – I don't know – when he contracted out everything. I just want to see whether it's been a cost saving to privately contract out rather than the way it used to be. But I appreciate the information and the work of the department.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion as amended carried]

### Treasury Branches

Q6. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted.

Did the agenda and priorities committee, the Treasury Board, and/or members of the Executive Council ever receive risk assessments or valuation analyses of the July 13, 1994, and September 26, 1994, refinancing proposals between the Alberta Treasury Branches, Nomura Asset Capital Corporation, and Nomura Securities International?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on this particular written question and to save time in the future also on all related written questions and motions for returns, if it's anything to do with the Treasury Branches, especially anything at all that might affect some of the present proceedings, of which there are many going on, related to West Edmonton Mall, I would be in violation of *Beauchesne*, which is very clear on this issue. It doesn't even get to the answer. It says that a question must not "be asked which might prejudice a pending trial in a Court of law."

Mr. Speaker, in my response I would look to you for some direction, because in fact it doesn't even allow us to get to the answer. It says that a question must not even "be asked which might prejudice a pending trial in a Court of law." I would look to you for some guidance on whether the question can even be asked, that one or any similar questions related to ATB that are presently on the Order Paper. That's up to you to determine, sir, and I will not presume to give you any guidance on that.

But whether the question is allowed or not, I can tell you that I am not at liberty to give an answer while there are many, many proceedings, unfortunately, related to Treasury Branches and West Edmonton Mall right now. I can't in good faith table anything in this regard. I'd be happy to sit down at some time with the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and talk in general about these issues and see if he might be satisfied. It's not that I'm trying to hide anything, but I have certain restraints upon me in terms of what can be released, and I am guided by that and also by our own lawyers in this regard. When all these court cases are settled, if they ever are, by the courts or otherwise, it may be prudent at that time to release certain information.

That also applies, Mr. Speaker, to the ongoing requests that we continue to have not just related to West Edmonton Mall or Triple Five and any subsequent dealings with other organizations, but in fact we still get questions, both written and under Motions for Returns, where certain information is being asked about loan arrangements or loan guarantee arrangements. As the people of Alberta well know and understand, we are out of that business of loan arrangements, loans, loan guarantees. However, with the ones which were in place before it became our policy to get out of those, before 1993, we are still confined by certain commercial arrangements with the commercial entity with which we're connected, in fact where there's an agreement that certain elements of those deals will not be released.

Now, we don't do those deals anymore, and when it comes to commercial information about a loan or loan guarantee, I myself don't have a problem with that information being released. I want you to know that. If the member gets concurrence from the entity named to release the information, I have no problem at all, and I would heartily be a signatory to approve that information being released.

I'll just serve notice for the many on the Order Paper related to West Edmonton Mall, related to ATB, or requesting commercial information. If the member would just consider that this is my

response to all of those, it'll save me having to do it each of the very many times these questions and motions for returns are on the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker.

Not that I have a personal problem with it, but for the reason that I'm guided by the laws of this Assembly and also by our own legal counsel to protect the assets of Albertans, it's under those circumstances that I have to reject this request for the information on this one and the subsequent ones.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, just to clarify. It wasn't my intent to close debate. The Treasurer in his response asked a procedural question. I don't know whether you were going to rule on it or whether it was a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: There's no procedural question. These questions are on the Order Paper. They've gone through Parliamentary Counsel. They've been posted. They're here. There's no request asked of the chair to make any ruling.

Now, to close the debate?

MRS. SOETAERT: Can I speak now then?

THE SPEAKER: Yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments about this question and about the way the Treasurer hides behind legal mumbo-jumbo jargon.

MR. DAY: On a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Absolutely. On the point of order, Provincial Treasurer.

#### **Point of Order**

##### **Allegations against Members**

MR. DAY: Mr. speaker, I stated very clearly the reason and my intent why I can't release this information. It is the practice of the Assembly to accept on a member's word the reasons until they're proven otherwise.

Under 23(h), (i), and (j). I have just been accused of hiding something. I'm not hiding something. I'm responding the best way I can to legal guidance and the orders that I have before me. I am not hiding anything. I would appreciate it if she would withdraw that remark.

THE SPEAKER: On this point of order, hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Sure. I'll withdraw the remark, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, okay. It's very clear now. Please sit down, hon. member.

The chair has looked at the Order Paper and basically has assumed in his head that if there's progress made of the same degree as made last Wednesday, two things will happen. First of all, Wednesday will, for the most part, eliminate private members' options and private members' day, and secondly, we'll probably be here to the latter part of August dealing with these questions.

It's also true in this Assembly that when an hon. member makes a statement, one accepts the statement of the hon. member. The chair is going to be very, very vigilant with respect to moving these,

as much as can be done, within the time frame here afforded to all hon. members. The debate will be specifically on the question. With an innuendo and anything else associated with it, you're going to find interjections from me.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

#### **Debate Continued**

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my concern about the rejection of this question is that what the Treasurer is saying is that we cannot ask anything about West Edmonton Mall; period. We've broken it down into specific questions, and I believe that if he wants to, he can say: it's under advisement; we don't want anything at risk.

I have some concerns that the Treasurer said: it doesn't matter what question comes up on West Edmonton Mall; these are the issues, and I'm not going to give you the information. I think that's kind of a broad statement over all the questions that are going to come up. You would think they would deal with it one at a time. Taxpayers' dollars are involved. We have every right to ask the questions. I really believe that to make a broad, sweeping statement that all the West Edmonton Mall questions will not be given any answers isn't really fair nor does it respect the idea of Written Questions in this Assembly. So I am disappointed that we're not getting the answer to this question.

3:00

Some of my taxpayer dollars out of my pocket went down the tubes with that investment. I want to know, and I'm sure 33,000 other people in my constituency want to know too. I wish that the Treasurer would at least amend it so he could give partial answers, that he would make an effort. Maybe his department could phone our Treasury critic and give him some qualified amendments to at least try to give him some information, but it seems quite obvious to me that the Treasurer has no intention of answering any questions on West Edmonton Mall, and I don't think that's right.

So with those few concerns about Written Question 6, I let you continue chairing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments with respect to the debate from the side opposite. There were comments made about taxpayers losing money, and it should be clear to this Assembly – it's been clear in the Treasurer's explanation – that taxpayers have not lost any money. The loan is there. There's been no foreclosure completed. There's been no money lost to date. There's been a write-down on the books, but there's been no loss of taxpayers' money to date.

MRS. SOETAERT: A write-down?

MR. HANCOCK: There's been a write-down on the books, which is a common practice in financial circles.

The other thing which I clearly heard the Provincial Treasurer say was that he would not be answering questions which required the release of information in which third parties were involved. I think that should be very clear. There's very good reason for it, as the member should know. It's not a question of legal mumbo jumbo or anything else. It's a question very clearly of not being able to release information which has third-party implications and requires third-party consent. He invited members from the opposition to get that third-party consent, in which case he'd be pleased to release the information.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise also to express some concern about the expressed inability of the Treasurer to answer Written Question 6. Written Question 6 is quite specific. All it's requesting is to have the Treasurer tell us whether the Executive Council or the agenda and priorities committee ever received risk assessments or valuation analyses pertaining to those particular dates. I'm surprised that the Treasurer can't even answer this question yes or no, much less release the information. That certainly puzzles me.

I have been asked in my own constituency questions about West Edmonton Mall and the ATB relationship. I think to answer these questions yes or no would at least help those of us who represent our constituency to go back and say: yes, there is information; it may be released today, or it may not be released for two years hence because of court cases or whatever. But to get a flat no and get sort of an expression of inability to release any information is very disappointing, and I think it thwarts the democratic process.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I, too, was taken aback by the rationale for the refusal, and I don't know whether the refusal comes because of the statement from the Treasurer that he doesn't want to run the risk of offending sub judice rules or run the risk of interfering with court proceedings or whether perhaps there was a misunderstanding of the question, because the question, as Edmonton-Strathcona has just alerted us all, is really a yes or no question. Obviously I think in the public interest the valuation reports, if they exist, should be released, but the question simply asks if the agenda and priorities committee or the Treasury Board or the Executive Council received those risk assessments.

Now, I will note that in the Auditor General's report on the 1994 refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, on page 21 the Auditor General refers to the Nomura proposal. In fact, there's a whole section of the report that pertains to the Alberta Treasury Branch negotiations with Nomura Asset Capital Corporation and Nomura Securities International.

It's not this member of this Assembly that put that into the public domain. It's not the Treasurer that put that into the public domain. In fact, this whole train started down the track when the owners of West Edmonton Mall filed a caveat in court and certain things became public that hadn't been public before.

As a result of that, the Treasurer last summer invited the Auditor General to do a special duty audit that subsequently was released in the form of a report under section 17(2) of his act, and that report contains many, many interesting bits of information and comes to some conclusions and leaves some other questions unanswered. One of the things the report concludes is that there wasn't a lot of commercial judgment used in a whole sequence of decisions to do with the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

We know that when Nomura walked away, they got a fee. They were paid a fee. We know that the Premier authored a memorandum that suggested a decision had been made not to go into a second deal with Gentra financial, but what we don't know is on what basis. There were obviously concerns around the government table, but we don't know what those concerns were. We don't know whether those concerns were based on political judgment – and that doesn't mean that they're not valid – or economic judgment or facts in terms of valuation and assessment that had been requested and then provided.

I would be far more comforted if I knew that Treasury Board or Executive Council had asked for the risk assessments and the valuations. If they had asked for them, then I could argue that at least the government exhibited a certain degree of due diligence. I and the Auditor General in his report share the same concern that perhaps those valuations or assessments weren't even requested, let alone reviewed. If that's the case, then the conclusion stands that there was poor or no commercial judgment used when it came to the decision to insist on a so-called made-in-Alberta solution to the financial woes of West Edmonton Mall.

The Treasurer may want to revisit his blanket refusal, and he may want to evaluate each one of these questions on their own merits. He may want to determine which ones could be answered with a simple yes or no and which ones may require third-party release. But I will point out again that many of those third parties have quite willingly put many documents into the public domain. It is certain members of Executive Council who have not put records into the public domain and instead have reminded us time and time again that they have made things available to the Auditor General. We have to take them at their word that those things have been made available to the Auditor General, because we'll never be able to independently confirm, it seems, what was or wasn't turned over to the Auditor General.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I'll also point out that, with the argument of sub judice, the Treasurer should be directed to Standing Order 23(g), which deals with what matters can be responded to. I will note that that section of our Standing Orders, which are the ultimate authority in this House, concludes with the following phrase:

Where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate.

In other words, it is the will of this Assembly that when there is some doubt, the doubt should lead to the conclusion that debate be allowed, not stifled. All we're asking for is simply for the government to adhere to the Standing Orders and recognize that you cannot hide behind sub judice as though it were some sort of shield against disclosure in a matter like this.

3:10

Now, I'll also challenge a comment made by the Government House Leader when the Government House Leader quite spontaneously took it upon himself to enter debate and inform the Assembly of the fact that there has not been a single taxpayer dollar lost on the government involvement through the Alberta Treasury Branch with West Edmonton Mall. I find that to be an astounding observation from the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, the Government House Leader and a member of the legal profession, because I'm assuming that he would not make such a comment without having done some reading and some research and that he would not assume to have knowledge of matters that he in fact may not have.

The Auditor General in his own report concludes that 152 million tax dollars have been lost through dealings between the Alberta Treasury Branch and the principals of West Edmonton Mall. That's not my conclusion. It's not Alberta Treasury Branch's conclusion. It is the conclusion of the Auditor General. So I would like to know what the Government House Leader knows that the Auditor General apparently doesn't. Why would the Government House Leader tell the Assembly something that is contradicted in writing in the published report of the Auditor General? That's a \$152 million mistake, and I don't think it should go unnoted.

Madam Speaker, I will ask once again for the Treasurer to change

his mind and recognize that this is a very simple question that would not violate sub judice, would not prejudice proceedings before the court, and would only add a little bit of light to this murky, murky situation. While I ask the Treasurer to reconsider his outright rejection of this legitimate request, I would also ask the Government House Leader to retract his comment and acknowledge that in fact well over \$150 million has been lost to date and the meter is still running.

[Motion lost]

### West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

Q7. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted.  
What analysis was prepared for Treasury Board and/or members of the Executive Council to show that the October 31, 1994, refinancing package for the West Edmonton Mall involved less risk and exposure to the Alberta Treasury Branches than the March 10, 1994, proposal between Alberta Treasury Branches and Gentra Canada Investments Inc.?

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I don't want to repeat myself, and I noticed that the Treasurer in his remarks to Written Question 6 indicated that he didn't want to have to repeat himself either, if I can paraphrase. That's why he was saying basically sub judice, "We can't answer the questions, and we need third-party agreement," and that he wasn't going to provide any responses, which is not dissimilar, of course, to the Premier in *Hansard* during question period when he said that he's not going to answer any more questions on this matter, which I find very, very curious, because of course the Auditor General isn't responding to questions on this matter either. He's saying that it's up to the government to respond. So Albertans are left sort of in a quandary as to who's going to take responsibility for this particular turkey.

In any case, we do have a situation where we know a couple of things happened back in February of 1994. We know that on Valentine's Day there was an agenda and priorities committee meeting, we know that West Edmonton Mall financing was discussed, and we know that a week and a day later, on February 22, the Premier wrote his now infamous memo to the then Treasurer and then Deputy Premier saying: remember; we agreed that the Gentra deal won't go ahead and remember that we are looking for this made-in-Alberta solution.

Now, the Auditor General in his report went to some trouble to try to determine whether or not there was understanding about what this phrase "made-in-Alberta solution" really meant. It's quite fascinating to read his report and to read the variety of responses received on the question of what a made-in-Alberta solution is. There was no agreement, and in fact you get the feeling when you read the report – it's like that old cliché when somebody's asked about art and they say: well, I don't know art, but I know what I like. It seemed to me that this phrase "made-in-Alberta solution" was some sort of code word for do whatever you think you have to do, and don't tell me any details, which reminds me of something else.

When you read the literature in terms of espionage, Madam Speaker, you get some insight into plausible deniability. You know, only tell people enough so they can do what they need to do, but don't tell them the whole picture so that they can deny with some reasonableness their knowledge of the whole undertaking.

So we have this code phrase, "made-in-Alberta solution," with no clear agreement or understanding what it means, yet something dramatic happened. The deal that had been negotiated between the Alberta Treasury Branch and Gentra, which would have provided a private-sector led refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, would have

kept them all in business, would have still had some Alberta Treasury Branch involvement – they wouldn't have been absolutely free and clear, but certainly their exposure would have been much reduced from what it is today – was rejected, and it appears that it was rejected in part on the strength of intervention from government.

Now, the question, the question that so many people ask, really is whether that intervention was appropriate or inappropriate. The Auditor General says that he can't find evidence of inappropriate involvement. The Auditor General also says that not all of his questions were answered. So we are trying to add more quality and value to the work that's already been undertaken by requesting this information. The question is a simple one. What analysis was prepared for the Treasury Board? What analysis was prepared for Executive Council? What analysis was used to base the decision to scuttle the Gentra private-sector led refinancing and instead pursue this so-called made-in-Alberta solution? We now know this meant over \$400 million worth of taxpayers' dollars being exposed to risk through a combination of direct interest-free loans and extremely low interest rate loan guarantees, the kind of commercial loan that a shopkeeper in Ponoka or a professional starting a new business practice in Lacombe would just salivate over if they could go to the Alberta Treasury Branch and get the kind of financial terms that the mall was able to extract.

The question is one which deserves an answer, and it deserves an answer because it is absolutely key to understanding the behaviour of the government of the day, which has brought us to the point now where hardly a day goes by without another tentacle of this scandal reaching out and grabbing our attention. So I'm hoping the government will quickly agree to Written Question 7 and share with the Legislative Assembly and, through us, with the people of the province the analysis that was used that resulted in over 400 million of their tax dollars being put at risk.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. Treasurer has asked that I reject this question on his behalf.

MRS. SOETAERT: Just a few brief comments on my grave disappointment in the minister's comments that, no, we're rejecting the question. Madam Speaker, that minister, though he was speaking for the Treasurer, also said that we haven't lost money on West Edmonton Mall. That's not true. The Auditor General says \$152 million over the years. In 1986 we lost \$63 million and in 1990, \$60 million. The cumulative loss – let's just go with the cumulative loss – turns out to be \$118 million over the years. Then the losses on disposal of nonmall assets transferred to the ATB is another \$34 million, for a total of \$152 million. So the minister cannot say that we haven't lost any money. We have. In my humble estimation, \$152 million is a lot of money. And we always hear: oh, yeah, the Liberals would spend money on this. You know, what we wouldn't spend it on is a loan guarantee of \$152 million. We wouldn't.

3:20

As a result, it is our job as Official Opposition to question where the money went, to question why you didn't take the deal. If you didn't take the deal that involved less risk, the refinancing package from Gentra that involved less risk and exposure to the Alberta Treasury Branches, why didn't you take that? That's a fair enough question. I'm sure a few people on the other side are very uncomfortable because maybe they know the answer and don't share it. I don't know. Maybe they don't know the answer. And you know what? If they don't, they should find out. I want to know why you

didn't take the deal that would have saved us money. Why wasn't that deal accepted? Nobody seems to be able to answer that one.

I just have grave concerns. It's not a waste of time in this Assembly when we stand up in here and say: how could you let this happen? Why was the better deal not taken? Is there something that we don't know, that people aren't telling us? I know my constituents are really ticked about this. They really are, because it's at a time when we can only give so much money to health, so much money to education, so much money to AISH recipients, so much money to children who really have difficulties, yet \$152 million is gone like that, with: don't ask the questions; how presumptuous of you to ask the questions.

MR. BONNER: How much more of your highway could have been paved?

MRS. SOETAERT: How much more of my highway could have been paved? Maybe we would have done more than just one-third of it this year.

MR. MacDONALD: How many classrooms could we . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: And in how many classrooms could we lower the pupil/teacher ratio with \$152 million?

MR. BONNER: That's about 3,000 teachers.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's a lot of teachers, 3,000 teachers across this province.

So, Madam Speaker, I am disappointed. It seems almost flippant that the government says: we're not giving you the answers. Either they're not willing to share it or they don't know. But I know that this government ran on no loan guarantees – no loan guarantees – we're out of the business of being in business. And here they are, in business, losing money yet again. I want some answers to that. I want some answers and so do taxpayers. I represent them. That's my job.

I would appreciate an amendment, some information, some acknowledgment that this is serious instead of a flippant: well, you're not getting the answers. I would like that in this Assembly, and I don't think it's asking for too much. I'm disappointed that this question isn't being accepted, Madam Speaker.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've actually been listening to the sort of semidebate going on with respect to the written questions. Being a new MLA in this House I think it's incumbent upon ministers to respond to written questions as written and if not responding to the full question to at least have the courtesy of amending the question.

Just as my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert indicated, we represent taxpayers, and the taxpayers are interested in knowing what transpired in the issue between West Edmonton Mall and the Alberta Treasury Branch and the government. We want answers. We're not trying to be nitpicky. We're not trying to stir up the pot. We're not trying to incite a riot, quote, unquote. We just want some answers because we're asked about it. We are asked what the answers are. So I think we are being responsible. When taxpayers' money is involved, we're all responsible. It's not an issue of them against us, us against whomever or whatever. It is accountability. When you're in the role of minister of Treasury, that role

behooves everybody in that department to let all taxpayers know what has transpired.

Madam Speaker, I'm not going to belabour the issues of pointing out how much was lost, how much wasn't lost. We still don't have a clear direction as to what transpired and why Alberta Treasury Branch became involved as opposed to maybe a lending company in the east that also made application.

I believe that in listening to questions, courtesy should be extended by the government to opposition members, to even members in their own party. We are seeking answers because we represent taxpayers in our own constituencies, and when we're asked specifics, when we have town hall meetings, we're grilled. Not just our Treasury critic or the minister of Treasury should know the answers; everybody should know. It should be a blanket policy that written questions, when they get to this degree, have to be brought to the Leg. The purpose of the question period is for answers, not an exercise for people to say: oh, I'm not going to answer any of the questions dealing with West Edmonton Mall. We're going to try and amend and make it possible that maybe little bits of information would either appease the taxpayers or at least give us a sense of direction as to where they're going. We have no idea.

Madam Speaker, I too am very disappointed that the minister has not seen fit or will not extend the courtesy to our critic, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, to answer the question. It's an excellent question, and all taxpayers in this province need an answer.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, am astonished at the cavalier fashion that this written question was rejected. One hundred and fifty-two million dollars is a considerable sum of money, and this cannot continue. We put our hands in our pockets and told the Alberta public that we were not in the business of being in business. A year after the election these arrangements came forward, and through the persistence of my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora the whole idea of a public inquiry has come forward. There is more reason than ever before, with the rejection of this question, that we need a public inquiry. The public inquiry is not a court of law. It's simply an inquiry. It's a fact-finding mission. It's a mission to acquire on behalf of the taxpayers of this province the truth, and if \$152 million is not reason enough to strike a public inquiry, then I don't know what is.

If we're going to reject this written question in the fashion we saw here, Madam Speaker, then it only allows me to conclude that there is definitely something that has still been hidden from the public, that has still been hidden from the taxpayers. Hopefully someone in Alberta somewhere, somehow, sometime before the next election is going to question the hon. member and his colleagues about this \$152 million loan loss after we put our hands in our pockets and said: we're out of the business of being in business; it won't happen again; we have learned our lesson.

3:30

I'm not going to go into the list of industrial five-year plans that this government attempted. It reminds me of the Communist regimes in Russia. They would have these grand schemes for five years that didn't work, and the industrial strategies of this government obviously did not work. This is a loan, a guarantee – we can go through the whole list – but it wasn't for the benefit of Alberta taxpayers.

It is a concept that governments are referees. They allow free

enterprise, they encourage free enterprise, but they don't blow their whistles and get directly involved. I'm afraid members across the way, Madam Speaker, do not have taxpayers' best interests at heart whenever they cavalierly dismiss a question that is trying to get to the root of a problem, and the problem is the wasting of \$152 million.

I'm very, very disappointed. We talk about openness, we talk about accountability, we talk about what's best for taxpayers, and then we reject this written question. I say that it's time for a public inquiry into this whole financial mess.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to provide some further debate on this question this afternoon. While the government's response is to refuse to supply the information requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I recognize that it really puts them in a bind. If they provide analysis that in fact the Treasury Board and members of Executive Council considered refinancing, they've in essence admitted that they're in the business of doing business in this province. And while that message rhetorically has been flipped to indicate that they're out of the business of doing business over the course of the last term of government, providing this information would really be evidence to the contrary. In reality I can see that while the Government House Leader this afternoon stood up to say that it would not be provided, he didn't give any rationale as to why that was the case, so I'm attempting to fill in that gap this afternoon.

I thought it was interesting, in the context of the question proposed and the government's response, to look at Treasury's values and their core business and what they state as their goals in their business plan. It's interesting that within their values, they want to "develop a professional working environment that encourages objectivity, integrity and equality." How better to achieve objectivity and integrity, Madam Speaker, than to provide information that shows how the government made decisions with respect to the advancement of the loan to West Edmonton Mall? Further, in their core businesses Treasury cites that their number one core business is to "provide analysis." The second component of core businesses is to "maintain a framework that fosters government accountability." Fourthly is to "manage the province's financial assets and liabilities," and fifthly, to "foster a fair and efficient financial marketplace."

It's puzzling to me, Madam Speaker, and a bit contradictory in light of, again, the response of the government this afternoon, not interested in being accountable at all, not interested in providing analysis, and not interested in demonstrating the steps they had undertaken to manage the province's financial assets and liabilities in an efficient manner. That's the premise of the question being asked this afternoon. I can't understand why it would not be within this government's mandate to provide such information.

Moving now to the Auditor General's report on the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. When you consider the unquestionable maze of negotiations – backroom meetings, communications through a variety of people, many of whom were members of the Executive Council, some by phone, some by letter, some in meeting discussions – again, what we have lacked I guess in the wake of the Auditor General's report is really any type of objective analysis of the material the government considered in their deliberations about this matter.

It reminds me yet again of the Premier's attack of over a week

ago, two weeks ago in fact, on a research institute in this city with respect to an economic analysis. He didn't like the findings of that report, so he called not only the author of the report to task but the institute sponsoring the conference. I'm referring to the Parkland Institute and the Premier's letter to the president of the university, Rod Fraser. Here again we're talking about analysis. We're talking about the provision of material, of information upon which this province is governed and based. At the Parkland Institute there was the provision of information, an analysis about I guess a side of the economy that this government, Madam Speaker, doesn't want to acknowledge.

With West Edmonton Mall, in a similar vein, there is a flip side to the reality of the refinancing that the government has not wanted to acknowledge. So the questions – I think we're now reaching the second one posed this afternoon by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora – are not being accepted by this government because it would provide too much information, too much analysis, which I suspect would contradict the spin they have placed on this whole issue since the story and the litigations and the Auditor General's report were commenced.

In summary, Madam Speaker, it's not a good indication of the openness, the accountability of this government when these types of questions are proposed and turned down and, specifically, turned down without any rationale.

Thank you.

3:40

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me. I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the hon. Treasurer's flat refusal to answer Written Question 7 on the Order Paper. I'm really surprised that he has taken this route. The Treasurer is a very prominent member of the cabinet. He has a national profile, both because he is recognized by *National Post* and others as a leading practitioner of the kind of politics they like, and he's also been commended I guess by the national press for his innovative ways of making changes in the taxation system of the province. So he has a national profile.

He certainly, even outside of this province in other contexts, has taken leading roles and is looked up to as someone who might provide leadership in other arenas later on. For a person, a politician, and a cabinet minister of such public visibility to simply say that he will not answer this question without providing any rationale – as an MLA who was elected two years ago to represent my constituents, and they knew that I would be an opposition MLA, I have certain expectations of ministers such as the Treasurer to answer questions diligently, to take earnestly the requests for information which are made by way of written questions.

Written questions is one of many means of asking for information which will provide the grounds for judging whether or not the government allows itself to be held accountable for the decisions it makes. To simply say, "I will not answer this question, and I don't need to explain either to you in this Assembly or to you Albertans," in my view is arrogant, is to deny the obligation that he as a member of the cabinet has to us in the House and to Albertans to provide information which will help us make judgments whether or not the government has made the right decisions.

It's a sad day that a question which stands on the Order Paper for weeks and weeks and then comes up for answer is simply rejected out of hand. In my view, it smacks of disrespect not only for this Assembly but for the democratic process. I think we need to take



serious note of such refusals to address the questions which are asked, because we, all of us, are obliged to seek this information on behalf of our constituents. There's no escape from it.

So to leave me standing here wondering why the Treasurer has decided not to answer this question leaves me in a very difficult position vis-a-vis my constituents. What do I do? They'll judge my effectiveness in this House on the basis of whether the questions that I ask are rejected because I don't make sense, because I can't frame them in a language that's understandable, or whether they are turned down in spite of my best efforts, in spite of the clarity that I may bring to the asking of the questions, in spite of the urgent relevance of the questions that I ask. On all of these counts I think this question should have been answered. It is relevant. It is of urgent necessity. It is clearly stated.

Clearly, the Treasurer in particular is very impressive in the way he can interpret words. I just want to draw, Madam Speaker, your attention to the wording of the question: "what analysis was prepared?" There are perhaps three or four different ways in which the Treasurer, assuming his cleverness with words, could have answered this question and answered it in a way which would have told this House absolutely nothing. At least that would have indicated to us that he's respectful of the tradition which written questions represent in the legislative processes of this Assembly and similar Assemblies elsewhere. But the Treasurer, I guess simply driven by a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance, simply decided not to answer the question.

I remember, Madam Speaker, that yesterday the Treasurer, in his usual playful mood, was pointing fingers at me and my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands. He was calling us socialists. Somehow he thought this was a derogatory term. If it is socialist to ask these kinds of questions, if it is socialist to insist on respect for the democratic process, then clearly I stand accused of such sins.

I think it's not a matter of being a socialist or being a neo-Liberal or being a follower of Milton Friedman or whomever else. It's a question of taking each other seriously and either saying, "I don't understand your question," or "Here are the following reasons why I can't answer it." But it's not right to simply say: I won't answer this question and I won't tell you why. That's what I find most disappointing, and I'll have to report this to my constituents, that this is how written questions are treated in this Assembly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate. Oh, I'm sorry.

Go ahead, hon. member. You're up.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to make a few comments on what I've heard here this afternoon and just reinforce the idea that, first of all, West Edmonton Mall was investigated by the Auditor General. We have his very, very thick report available to all members.

MR. SMITH: How thick is it?

DR. TAYLOR: It's about this thick I believe, Minister of Labour.

This is an independent person that's appointed by all parties. Not just the Conservatives, not just the Liberals, not just the NDs but all parties appoint this individual. He's an officer of the Legislature, so I think we have to recognize that and be fair in comments when we say that this independent individual has released a very good report. [interjections] Well, other members on the other side are coughing and making some other sorts of noise. I'm not quite sure what they are. You know, if they want to stand up and criticize the Auditor

General, then I encourage them to do so, as I would if I had some criticism to make of the Auditor General. So rather than just making these noises have the courage of their convictions and get on their feet and criticize the Auditor General.

The other thing I would point out. I'm not sure how many legal cases are involved in this right now. The Treasurer or perhaps the Minister of Justice would have a better idea than I do. But clearly, even from one who is not a lawyer, Madam Speaker, I recognize that one cannot comment on cases that are in front of the court. I mean, it is only common sense. Now, I realize that that sometimes is lacking on the other side, but a commonsense approach to this, since we're a commonsense government, recognizes that you cannot comment, especially a cabinet minister, as the Provincial Treasurer is. He cannot comment on matters that are in front of the court.

So I would encourage the members on the opposite side to think about this, think about this seriously. Forget the polemics, and let's get down to business. Let's get through this one and get on to other issues. This is private members' day today, and these members are needlessly, needlessly taking up the time of private members' day to discuss these useless kinds of arguments that they're making.

3:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Well, well, Madam Speaker, the minister of science, research, and information technology makes some interesting points in his remarks. He concluded his statements by suggesting that these inquiries were useless. He also concluded his remarks by making reference to a waste of private members' time. Now, I am at a loss to understand how a written question on the Order Paper in the name of a private member is a waste of private members' time. Probably what he meant to say was that he believes it's a waste of the government's time. Now, I'll give him an opportunity to correct himself if he wants to. I know that member as a logical and rational thinker, so the contradiction must have simply been a slip of the tongue as opposed to a purposeful misstatement, because I don't think he would do that.

Now, as far as whether or not these questions have any utility, I wonder what advice he would have given to his colleague member of Executive Council on the day that he went in to see the Premier and said, "Well, boss, we've got a problem, and I'm going to call in the Auditor General to help us." If these questions were a waste of time, I'm assuming that the minister would have said to his colleague the Treasurer: hey, don't ask those questions; they're a waste of time. Obviously that didn't take place. So again I have to come to a very different conclusion than the minister and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

I'll also comment that not one thing, not one sliver, not one little, teeny-weeny piece of the information that's requested in Written Question 7 is a matter that is before the courts. Not any of it. So if the minister wants to use the sub judice argument, he should find a matter that's before the courts before he makes that argument, because as far as I'm aware, nobody yet has taken the provincial government to court because of their inappropriate involvement in West Edmonton Mall. Maybe they know about something that we don't know about, but this matter is not before the courts, so we should not be denying a response for that reason.

There's also nothing that's truly a third-party matter here. The question is very straightforward: "What analysis was prepared for Treasury Board and/or members of the Executive Council." Now, I could see the government standing up and arguing an exclusion pertaining to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy

Act because there are Executive Council exclusions. I wouldn't accept it, but I could at least understand that argument. The argument that somehow it would offend a third party when it's before the court: well, those are irrelevancies; they're a smoke-screen. You know, if you're losing an argument, what you do is start bringing in things that are irrelevant and try to cloud the issue. Of course, that's the only motive that I can attribute to the government for raising these irrelevancies: because they feel that they're losing the argument.

I take no pleasure in seeing the government reduced to this kind of subterfuge. I take no pleasure in that whatsoever. I would much rather have the government stand and be accountable in the way that my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona just enunciated. We would expect the government to answer legitimate questions and not try to generate more heat than light, as the saying goes.

MRS. SLOAN: More wheat than chaff?

MR. SAPERS: That's a little too rural for me.

The Auditor General on page 11 of his report says the following: "Given that the government decided to provide direction with respect to the WEM refinancing" – let me say that again for emphasis.

Given that the government decided to provide direction with respect to the WEM refinancing, I would have expected the memorandum to indicate precisely the degree to which, if any, ATB was to provide financing as part of "an Alberta solution." However, if a specific direction was not given out of concern that it would be construed as inappropriate political involvement, the memorandum should have been clear that it was the Superintendent's decision to decide whether to provide financing. Further, once it made the decision to delay finalizing the Genra/ATB agreement, the Committee should have monitored progress so that it could revise decisions if necessary.

It was the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat who talked about the Auditor General's report and who suggested quite inappropriately that I and my colleagues are somehow casting aspersions upon the person or the office of the Auditor General, which of course is not the case. It was that member who raised the issue of his report and its completeness.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Well, this question in fact flows from that finding in the Auditor General's report, the finding that there was government involvement and that that government involvement under section 2, Findings and Conclusions on Political Involvement, in part was this memorandum from the Premier to two of his members of Executive Council which talked about this made-in-Alberta solution. That was the Auditor General's conclusion, not mine.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the government has not provided a single, solitary reason for rejecting this question other than the fact that they just don't want to, which I guess is their prerogative to just be obstinate. Because of the importance of this matter, because of the dimensions of the situation, I would call upon the government to rethink their strategy and take the risk of being a little bit more forthcoming and put this issue to rest as quickly as it can be – let's not prolong the agony any further – to tell Albertans what they knew, when they knew it, and what they did about it. Then we can get on with the rest of the business of the day. Until we answer those fundamental questions, unfortunately this is going to be hanging over this government's head like a big black thundercloud.

So I would ask them to please reconsider the rejection of Written Question 7.

[Motion lost]

### Highway Maintenance Costs

Q24. Mrs. Soetaert moved that the following question be accepted. How much did Alberta Transportation and Utilities spend in each fiscal year 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98 for provincial highway maintenance excluding snow clearing and related work, how much was paid to department staff, and how much was paid to private contractors?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move an amendment to Written Question 24. The amended question would read:

How much did Alberta Transportation and Utilities spend in each fiscal year 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98 for primary highway maintenance activities for the summer months, April to October?

Mr. Speaker, this question in essence is the flip side of Written Question 4. In response to that question the department has agreed to table the cost to maintain primary highways during the winter months.

Mr. Speaker, if this proposed amendment is accepted, the department is prepared to table with the Assembly the cost to maintain primary highways during the summer months. I believe this amendment will address the intent of the hon. member's question.

4:00

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, the department contacted us last night and gave us this information. I appreciate the minister's attempt to answer the question and his amending it so that he can.

The one thing I really wanted out of this that I'm not sure I'm going to get – maybe I will, but I'm not sure because the amendment isn't clear about it. I would like a breakdown of what's paid to private contractors. That's what I am really looking for with this question, and I hope the minister will include that in this amended written question.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the minister will provide the information that I'm looking for. At least I'm ever so hopeful that he will.

Thanks.

[Motion as amended carried]

### Highway Maintenance Costs

Q34. Mrs. Soetaert moved that the following question be accepted. How much did Alberta Transportation and Utilities spend in each fiscal year 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98 for work conducted by departmental staff pertaining to provincial primary highway maintenance and preservation, and with respect to each year how much was spent on administration, how much on work carried out on the highways, and how much on inspections and auditing?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move an amendment

to Written Question 34. The amended question would read thus:

How much did Alberta Transportation and Utilities spend in each fiscal year 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98 for work conducted by departmental staff pertaining to primary highway maintenance with respect to supervision, inspections, and audit?

Mr. Speaker, if the amendment is accepted, Alberta Transportation and Utilities will be pleased to provide to the Assembly the administrative costs of primary highway maintenance.

However, the hon. member's question appears to require specific information on administration, inspection, and auditing. The department's accounting procedures, however, do not keep separate records as such. Rather, the material I intend to table in response to this question will include auditing, inspection, and supervision expenditures under the heading of administrative costs.

MRS. SOETAERT: I respect the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the breakdown is not available and that that is why I can't get the information. Maybe as a suggestion I might suggest that there be a breakdown in the future.

I was specifically worried about inspections because that's been privatized over the years, and I've had a lot of calls and concerns about all kinds of safety inspections with school buses, with big trucks on the highways, and the amount of accidents that are happening. I really wanted the information: a breakdown of what it costs for inspections and inspectors, what we spend on that now. I have a fear that it's been neglected or forgotten. From my understanding of the minister's response, the breakdown isn't available or isn't done. So it would be my humble suggestion that maybe it could be done in the future.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I've made my points and my requests clear. I appreciate the co-operation from the department that we have received to date.

Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

#### Deferred School Board Expenditures

Q42. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.  
What is the extent in dollars of the deferred maintenance and capital expenditures projected by the fiscal year 1999-2000 for each of the school boards in the province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I accept Written Question 42 from the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Education for accepting my question, and I look forward to his answer soon.

[Motion carried]

#### Deferred Highway and Road Costs

Q43. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the extent in dollars of the deferred maintenance and capital cost for major highways and secondary roads separately under provincial jurisdiction projected by the fiscal year 1999-2000?

DR. PANNU: With your permission, Mr. Speaker, if I may say a few words in background. This series of questions that stand on the Order Paper in my name were all inspired by a question that I asked of the Auditor General in November, on November 18 to be precise, during the Public Accounts Committee meeting. The question had to do with the deferred maintenance costs that the department of advanced education had apparently reported to the Auditor General. I requested some specifics on these deferred costs.

My request was forwarded by the Auditor General to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development, and the minister was more than kind to provide me with information in detail with respect to six postsecondary institutions, three of them in Calgary and three of them in Edmonton. According to the information that he provided, of these six institutions – and I'm talking only about six of the many postsecondary institutions – there is a deferred maintenance cost of \$171,882,000, which was provided in the information. So there's a substantial amount of deferred costs that were reported by the minister of advanced education with reference to just these six institutions that exist in the two cities.

Having received this information, the question arose that perhaps it is also the case that various other departments of the government have also reporting procedures and statistics on deferred maintenance costs. So my Question 43 was asked in light of the information and, I think, the model of reporting information that is represented by the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

Thank you.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I move to reject this written question. The written question asks about the extent of "the deferred maintenance and capital cost" of highways. We can't accept this written question as the meaning of the word "deferred" is too vague to determine what exactly was the intent of the hon. member's motion. Indeed, under *Beauchesne* 428(b) this written question cannot be accepted.

Mr. Speaker, on March 15 I tabled the three-year primary construction and rehabilitation program for 1999-2002 and the annual secondary highway construction program for '99-2000. There'll be ample opportunity for members of the Assembly to raise questions during the debate on the department's 1999-2000 estimates and on why a given highway or a portion of a highway is included or excluded from these programs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

4:10

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to note for the record that the minister's department tried to get in touch with me, in fact did get in touch with me last night with respect to, I presume, some difficulties that the department had with interpreting the nature of the question. So I thank the minister for the effort that he made on behalf of his department to seek some clarification. I know that the minister has not rejected my question out of hand. He has paid attention to it, and he has given reasons why he thinks he cannot offer the information that I'm requesting.

I do hope that the minister will continue to dialogue with me, and I will certainly clarify the nature of the question, if that's where the problem lies. So I certainly expect the full co-operation of the

minister in getting the information that I'm seeking, provided I can make the meaning of what I seek clear to him.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

#### **Deferred Regional Health Authorities Expenditures**

Q44. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.  
What is the extent in dollars of the deferred maintenance and capital expenditures projected by the fiscal year 1999-2000 in each of the 17 Alberta regional health authorities?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the government rejects Written Question 44. The Department of Public Works, Supply and Services estimates for the 1999-2000 fiscal year have not yet been considered by the Committee of Supply or voted to date. In my submission, questions of this type can be addressed in Committee of Supply when members of this Assembly consider our 1999-2000 estimates.

What I can assure the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, Mr. Speaker, is that Public Works, Supply and Services works with the Department of Health and the regional health authorities to identify priority requirements. By focusing capital works funding on life safety issues and essential program needs, Public Works, Supply and Services is able to address program priorities identified by the department in consultation with the Department of Health and the regional health authorities.

For the information of the hon. member's reference, Health capital projects recommended for the 1999-2000 year are listed on pages 349 and 350 of the 1999-2000 government estimates book.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly look at the pages that have been referred to by the minister.

I am somewhat puzzled. However, I'm sure there is a reason why my Question 42 was answered in the affirmative by this same minister who stood up to answer Question 44. If the information pertaining to Question 42 is something that the minister is happy to forward to me, produce for me and for the Assembly, I wonder why this similar information related to RHAs is being denied. So I'm disappointed. I wish he had addressed the issue of what the difference is between Question 42 and Question 44 and then indicated to me why it is that he has accepted Question 42 but is rejecting Question 44.

With that said, I conclude my comments on the question. Thank you.

[Motion lost]

#### **Deferred Public Works Costs**

Q45. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.  
What is the extent in dollars of the deferred maintenance and capital cost projected by the fiscal year 1999-2000 for the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services?

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission, I just want to say a word or two as background to this question.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the people of Alberta through the government of Alberta own very substantial assets with a very large dollar value associated with these assets. It's a matter of pride for

most Albertans that we together, collectively, are stakeholders and shareholders in such wealth. I was visiting the Westerra institute building, which stands I think just southwest of Stony Plain. About last summer sometime – I think it was July or August – there was talk at that time of moving the Provincial Archives to that particular site, and we were all, the public and MLAs, invited to visit that site, which was one of many sites being considered at that time as the future home.

When I visited that place – the building is a fairly large structure owned by the government, owned by the people of Alberta – one thing that I was struck by was the rather poor condition that it was in. What I saw there was an important public asset that was simply going to waste because it wasn't being maintained properly while it was sitting idle for many years. The public works department of course is responsible for buildings such as the former Westerra institute building.

So it was that experience that I had on that day through this visit to this particular site that led me to include this question among the series of questions that have been addressed today in this Assembly. So that's the background to this question. I look forward to hearing the answer.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating myself, a similar response to this question. The government rejects Question 45. I do repeat that the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services estimates for the 1999-2000 fiscal year have not yet been considered by the Committee of Supply or voted to date. Accordingly, the question is premature at this time as members of this Assembly have not yet approved our budget estimates.

Also, Mr. Speaker, this government, including the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services, is committed to maintaining and enhancing Alberta's physical and technical infrastructure to ensure the appropriate foundation is in place to support future development and growth in this province.

Mr. Speaker, should Public Works, Supply and Services' 1999-2000 budget estimates be approved, the department will be able to address priority infrastructure maintenance requirements as well as priority capital works projects by continuing to carefully manage our resources.

Once again, for the hon. member's information and perhaps for the information of other members of the Assembly as well, Mr. Speaker, the PWSS proposed 1999-2000 capital expenditures are on pages 349 through 353 of the 1999-2000 government estimates book.

4:20

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'm just wondering. If the reason the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona can't get the answers is because we haven't gone through estimates yet, then why isn't there a commitment or an amendment that says, "We'll give you the information after those estimates"? I think that's a fair request. To just say, "Can't give it to you till the budget is done" is at best a poor excuse, I would say. I know that in the budget estimates there's a list of all the projects that are under way, but the hon. member is just asking for the "deferred maintenance" projected for the year. If that's in its entirety, well, okay. But the member is asking for "deferred maintenance."

MS BLAKEMAN: Maintenance enforcement?

MRS. SOETAERT: Not maintenance enforcement, no. Maintenance of buildings. We're into Public Works here.

I would just venture to say that I would appreciate an amendment that says, "We'll get it to you as soon as the budget is passed" or just that courtesy from that department to show they're willing to give that kind of information. I think it's possible, and I think it's not too demanding a request. I'm surprised and disappointed that that's the response from the government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very much like the minister, who risked repeating himself in answering Question 45 in the way he answered Question 44, I also would take this risk to repeat myself in saying how disappointed I am in hearing the answer that the minister has given, which is that the government will not answer this question. This question and the questions preceding this one that have been addressed and have stood in my name on the Order Paper were asked because of a very special concern that I have and, I suspect, most Albertans have about how in the process of reporting to Albertans that we have eliminated the deficit and that we have paid down the net debt, the government may have in fact created a new form of debt, debt that is not visible.

It appears to me that by and large it seems to be the intention of the government to ensure that this growing debt remains invisible. If that were not seen to be the meaning of the manner in which the government has answered my questions, then one would hope that the government would in fact be concerned about this growing debt that is not visible. Any responsible government would take it upon itself to enter into the ledger the debts that not only we owe to certain banks, to certain lending institutions but the debts that we create for ourselves, for our children as we withdraw public responsibility for maintaining and creating infrastructures that are absolutely essential for the operation of modern societies such as the one in which we live.

Just so that the government could report to Albertans that it's paid down or paid back the debt that we have owed is no reason to conceal from itself – I'm not sure if the government knows about it; I'm assuming it does. But it's equally safe to assume that it doesn't. So I'm not accusing them of simply hiding information because they haven't given me the information. They haven't told me whether or not this information is out there, to go and get it, that it's for everyone to see, or that they will not provide it, like the Treasurer did when it came to answering his question. It's difficult to speculate on this. I think it is a matter that Albertans are concerned about. They want to know what might be the postponed debts, debts that the next generation will have to pay if this generation refuses to address the nature of that debt and the scope of that debt and the ways in which it plans to pay it back and pay it down.

So it was for that reason that I raised these questions, and I certainly invite the members of the Assembly to reflect on this issue. It's no good simply to say that we have paid back the debt when in fact we are creating liabilities. We are creating future liabilities by failing to maintain our public properties, our public infrastructure. We know that that's happening. As I said, the minister of advanced education sets the model, in my view. One department is willing to stick its neck out and let the public know that there are now these debts being created, that there are these liabilities being created, and I hope that Albertans will make note of this. I hope that the colleagues of the minister of advanced education will learn something from his way of doing things and that this government will adopt this model.

After all, you know, adoption of better practices should be an institutional responsibility of the government. If you discover that something works, that something is important, why not make it mandatory for every department to keep records on this and produce that information for Alberta electors and Alberta citizens? That was the reason why I raised these issues. I hope someone is paying attention to them on the government side.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 107, 108, and 109.

[Motion carried]

### Lakeland Regional Health Authority Report

M8. Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the final report submitted by George B. Cuff & Associates Ltd. on the deficit elimination plan of the Lakeland regional health authority.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am curious to know from the minister what the status of that particular report is. We know that there was the first report that was submitted by Cuff & Associates on the deficit elimination plan. We know in fact that that report's recommendations are not being followed right now by the trustee that was appointed by the Minister of Health when he fired the Lakeland regional health authority. We also know that communities around the Lakeland region are in a state of apprehension because they're not quite sure where the axe will fall next. We have heard from a number of constituents in the Lakeland area: from Vilna, from Vegreville, from Myrnam, from Bonnyville, St. Paul. The list goes on. I can just continue in terms of the areas that we have heard from in the Lakeland region where there is considerable concern over what's happening.

4:30

We heard just late last week that there were 30 individuals whose names do not appear on the new organizational chart. Even though the spin that is being put on those 30 names is that they are administrators, the fact is that a large number of them are providing frontline care. They are unit nurses who provide frontline care, and those are the ones that are being potentially laid off. We know that the interim care beds in Vegreville on the third floor at St. Joe's are going to be closed down, which will then back up the acute care services there. What do you do with those individuals that are there? There are no other long-term care beds within that region. The closest place that's being looked at for these poor individuals is over 100 kilometres away.

So when we look at what is happening within the Lakeland region, it is only rational and only reasonable that a request be made by this side of the Legislative Assembly to ask for the final report of George Cuff. If in fact, Mr. Speaker, that report is not completed, then why is the trustee going ahead and making these decisions? Why in fact is the trustee going ahead and reorganizing without that final report?

There is either a final report there or there is not. If it is the first report that is the final report, then I think the minister should let Albertans know that that is the case.

With those comments I'm hopeful that the minister will explain what the situation is with regards to the Lakeland region and the Cuff report.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wish to indicate that we accept Motion for a Return 8. We'll be happy to provide the final report to the members of the Assembly in due course and according, of course, to the rules established for these matters.

The other comment that I would like to make very briefly is that I think the reorganization and resetting of priorities in the Lakeland health authority is going very well, with the emphasis on focusing resources towards patient care, the reorganization of the administrative structure to not only be more efficient but also, I think, to be better focused in terms of serving the system overall. Further, Mr. Speaker, with these and other changes along with of course the recent funding announcement, I'm quite confident that the individual acting as the board of the Lakeland regional health authority will be able to balance the budget and provide good leadership in that area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to conclude the debate.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you for that information. I know I can't ask a question, but my only comment on it would be that I'm not sure what "due course" means. I would hope that "due course" means immediately as opposed to three or four months down the road.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has moved acceptance of Motion for a Return 8. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:35 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hierath	Pannu
Barrett	Jacques	Paszkowski
Blakeman	Johnson	Pham
Bonner	Jonson	Renner
Boutilier	Klapstein	Severtson
Broda	Kryczka	Sloan
Burgener	Langevin	Smith
Cardinal	Leibovici	Soetaert
Clegg	Lougheed	Strang
Dickson	MacDonald	Tannas
Ducharme	Mar	Tarchuk
Dunford	Marz	Taylor

Fritz	McFarland	Thurber
Graham	Nicol	Trynchy
Haley	O'Neill	Yankowsky
Herard		

Against the motion:

Friedel	Melchin
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Totals:	For – 46	Against – 2
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[Motion carried]

### RHA Deficit Elimination Plans

M9. Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all deficit elimination plans submitted by regional health authorities between April 1, 1998, and February 17, 1999.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the minister were interested in providing that information but had trouble with the dates, I for one would not have a problem with that. The reason that we're asking for the deficit elimination plans – and we know that there are a number of them that have been submitted by regional health authorities – is because in those plans it would indicate what the commitment to the level of service is within each particular region. Again, it's a matter of openness and accountability and ensuring that residents of the particular regions have the ability of understanding what the potential would be of having to meet a finite budget within the health care sector.

So this is information that should not be secret information. This is information that should be public information so that each Albertan, if they wanted to see it in their regions, whether it is the Mistahia region, the Calgary region, the Edmonton region, West-View, Northern Lights, would have the ability to go to a place – well, once it's on record here, they could easily access it from this Legislative Assembly – and find what the considerations were in meeting the deficit elimination plans.

Now, the minister may well say that given the increases in the budget, there is no need for any of these plans to be implemented and that it is a matter of history. Whether that is the case or not, the essential element remains that the regional health authorities provide health care services to the individuals within their regions and sometimes outside of their regions and that it is crucial for individuals within the regions to know what the services are that might have been considered or might still be on the drawing table for deletion. So it's for those reasons that we are asking for those plans. This is not for purposes of fear mongering. This is not for purposes of curiosity. This is strictly for the purpose of ensuring that all Albertans have full access to information related to the services that they may or may not be able to access within their region.

4:50

It is a reasonable request, Mr. Speaker. It is one that I'm sure the other MLAs in this Legislative Assembly would wish to have access to so that they would be able to answer the concerns and questions that constituents have of them. I would hope, though I'm led to understand otherwise, that the minister would be willing to provide this information, even if it is in a modified form, on what the plans are that have been submitted to him over the last year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that, first of all, I want it to be very clear – and I will try to say it in a firm voice – that I am recommending rejection of this particular motion for a return. I would like to provide the rationale for so recommending.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite true that we have a process – and it is couched in policy and regulations – that regional health authorities are to provide for or plan for and have a deficit elimination plan based on the projected funds available to them going from one fiscal year to another. Regional health authorities did work on and submit deficit elimination plans as needed in some cases during the months leading up to late February, early March. There is a three-year business plan. There is a projected amount of money in our plan from last year that would have been available as an increase for regional health authorities this coming year.

However, Mr. Speaker, we must recognize that through the strong representation of our Premier and other first ministers across this country – and that was an effort that had been going on for a number of months but did not come to fruition, shall we say, until early in March, when there was a significant infusion of federal funds, which we as a provincial government more than matched in terms of an increase for health care. That very significant increase for the health care system, a large portion of which of course has been beneficial to regional health authorities, as people note from the recently presented budget, changes the whole picture for regional health authorities in this province in terms of their planning, their setting of priorities, their overall budget projection.

I would strongly suggest that there is no need, that it is not advisable to get back into deficit elimination plans which are now not relevant to the current fiscal situation. This is not to say that regional health authorities in this province don't need to plan their budgets carefully to deal with deficits that are carried over to the next year, but the numbers and the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, are dramatically different than they would have been with deficit elimination plans based on the information that regional health authorities had in prior months. So on that basis, I recommend rejecting this particular motion for a return.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The Calgary regional health authority spends about a billion dollars a year. They have a budget which is approximately the same size as that of the entire city of Calgary. The city of Calgary has 14 elected aldermen. We'd get to know if the city of Calgary is planning a deficit. They'd do some planning. It's done for the most part in an open council meeting. There are council people who are representative of and, hopefully, responsive to constituent concerns.

Mr. Minister, I still remember in the Calgary region when people were planning on the basis of a 3 percent cut, and there was a widespread concern in terms of what that was going to translate into in terms of more people waiting on gurneys for a hospital bed, more people waiting more months to get access to a surgical procedure. The problem has not gone away. It's true that there's some additional money there, but is it not important – this is a provincewide concern, but I'll speak for the citizens of the city I represent – for the citizens of Calgary to know, Mr. Minister, through the Speaker . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: One small part of Calgary, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: It may be small, but it's mighty important, hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, the point is this: are the people in the city of Calgary not entitled to know what kind of priority the CRHA puts on

frontline staff? Is it not relevant to know if the CRHA's plan was to lay off a thousand nurses or the trade-off was to cancel certain surgical procedures or close more beds at one of the three acute care centres? If we had the Premier's promise in the March 1997 election of electing two-thirds of the people to regional health authority boards, the minister would have a far stronger position, but the government backed off that promise, Mr. Minister.

So we have an unelected regional health authority – and you have 17 of them – that are drafting plans that have an enormous impact on the lives of people in those communities. Is it not fair and reasonable that citizens in my city of Calgary should know where their CRHA proposes to cut the next time they run into a crunch and the available resources don't meet the demand? Is it not fair for us to know whether they're going to aggressively cut administration or whether they're going to cut frontline staff or if they're to look at more delays in procedures? It's important to me to know where they put their priority, and that's one way of finding out.

Mr. Minister, through the Speaker, it just is not good enough to say that the federal government came along and put some additional money in and the province attempted to match that. I anticipate that in the city of Calgary we're expecting another 75,000 people in the next two years. I think we're going to be back in a jam again before very long. I want to know where those men and women on the Calgary regional health authority are putting their priorities, and I think a lot of Calgarians do too. I think the same expectation could be applied across the province. Now, if there are other reasons, let's hear them, but if the only reason is that he thinks that the good times are here and all of those cost pressures are behind us, I don't have that same sense of confidence. I see ongoing concerns, and it gets down to the public's right to know.

If the Calgary city council, if the Calgary board of education, if the Calgary Catholic board have got a deficit, we all know about it. The Calgary board of education had been looking at a \$35 million deficit. I think that was the most recent one. They'd been told by the minister that they had to reduce that over five years. Well, there are a lot of parents who are interested in where that \$7 million a year is going to come off in the same way we're interested in the sort of ordering of priorities for the Calgary regional health authority and every other regional health authority.

So I'm not persuaded by the explanation given by the minister. I hope the Calgary MLAs in this Chamber aren't persuaded either. I think Calgarians are going to be anxious to see what sort of concern there is for full disclosure on something as important here. Mr. Minister, through the Speaker, we all get those phone calls, and we have to be able to access that information.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a few brief comments about my concerns about the rejection of this motion. Specifically, I refer to WestView regional health authority. That's one of the health authorities that touches the boundary of my constituency. Well, Spruce Grove is a major part of it. They have been struggling with the lack of funds that they have, and though they are getting some money right now and it will address this present deficit, I don't think they see any hope for next year to have a vision, to envision the health services they could deliver in WestView, because of lack of funding.

The reality is that they're going to have to have a deficit pay-down plan, something that I know WestView is going to have to grapple

with, because they are just so desperately underfunded, disproportionately to the rest of the province. I wish the minister would address that. I'd like to see the information on it. It seems I'm neatly shut out of many meetings that the minister has with the MLAs that are involved with WestView. I just think it would be a courtesy.

Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to conclude the debate.

**MS LEIBOVICI:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am disappointed that the minister is not going to provide that information. As I indicated in my opening remarks, even if the plans were to change, that still doesn't negate the obligation and responsibility that I believe government has to provide full information to their citizens.

This is one of those areas where that information is more than useful in determining and alleviating perhaps some concerns, as we've heard from both the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, residents might have in those particular regional health authorities, to see what in fact the provision of service will be in their particular area, dependent on what dollars are available, and the importance that a particular regional health authority puts on certain levels of service as well. Is the service that regional health authority values more on the preventive side? Is it more on the acute care functions? Is it more on the long-term care functions? Where would the cuts, if there are any that are going to occur, occur? Would it occur with regards to staffing on the front line, or would it occur with regards to staffing in administration?

So these are very pertinent pieces of information that individuals need. They need to see it in an historical basis as well, to see what would have been and what is right now and what might be in the future, in order to put all those pieces of the puzzle together. To really be able to determine what a health care plan is for a particular region then, you can't do it without that piece of the puzzle.

As I indicated earlier, if there were some concerns around the time lines – and that perhaps was the reason for the minister rejecting – then I would be more than willing to change those time lines. And any point in time that the minister wishes to forward those plans to my office, we would be more than willing to accept them with open arms.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

### **Long-term Care Review Report**

**M10.** Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the report of the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, which was submitted to the Minister of Health in 1998.

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

**MS LEIBOVICI:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important motion, not that any of the others are less important, but it has amazed me since taking over the portfolio of health care critic how a report that was submitted to the Minister of Health in the early fall, is my understanding, on long-term care . . .

**AN HON. MEMBER:** August.

**MS LEIBOVICI:** August, late summer.

. . . has been kept under wraps, and we've had little inklings of what there was in that report.

For instance, if I look at the news release that was provided by the government on March 11, 1999, the backgrounder with regards to Budget '99: The Right Balance, it says very clearly in here, the launch of a new . . . program to help support the cost of drugs for short-term acute care patients receiving treatment in a home setting, as recommended by the Long-Term Care Review Advisory Committee.

The government has never indicated that this report does not exist. In fact they keep basing decisions on this particular report. We know that in fact this was an interim report, supposedly, that provided some information on funding, but the question remains: why would the government not wish to produce the total report? When you ask that question, it leaves a whole area open to speculation, and as the government well knows, the members of the Official Opposition have very active imaginations.

In fact, our imaginations are based on what we hear from constituents in our constituencies as well as citizens across the province. What they have said to us very clearly in the touring that I've done, in the touring that the critic for seniors has done, the Member for Edmonton-Centre – and the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry is a former critic for seniors. What the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has heard in his capacity as our Calgary caucus chair, what the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has also indicated very clearly is that the concern of long-term care is there and needs to be addressed quickly.

We know that the government has this review committee in place, that the committee is chaired by the Member for Redwater, and that there are meetings going on across the province sometimes attended by the member, actually mostly not attended by the member and mostly not attended by the other MLA that's on the committee as well.

So we know that there is a committee touring the province, that in fact that committee has got the community health councils and the regional health authorities bought into looking at what potential recommendations could be. So why wouldn't this government say: "You know what? We have a report, and there are other reports as well." Why wouldn't the government say that this is the report that was put out in August, and let all those volunteers, all those individuals, all those citizens that are spending time and energy build on that particular report, as it's pretending that there's a void in this province on any recommendations with regards to long-term care. I don't understand it, Mr. Speaker, and you know what? The people that I talk to don't understand it either.

Not only have we had a health summit that was arranged in two or three months – and that health summit has had supposedly major impact on this budget as well as the direction of this government in health care, and the recommendations aren't even in. We've had a blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37 that was organized to deal with the whole issue of private and public health care, and that took maybe two months to organize, if that, and we are waiting three and a half years at least, and we'll wait another six months, five months, for this recommendation to come through from the committee that's chaired by the Member for Redwater.

Then what do we have while we're waiting for this committee? On one hand, we have the government saying, "Yup, we're going to take some action," and on the other hand what we have the government saying is: "Well, you know the action we're going to take? We're going to close long-term care beds. We're going to close beds in Vegreville. We're going to close beds potentially in Vilna." I understand – and the minister is smiling – that the Vilna problem has been corrected, but the Vegreville problem is still there for him.



What we have are situations like that across the province, and the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I know, will want to get up and let the minister know about the problems that she's heard in her constituency about individuals who are sent long distances because there's no long-term care bed.

5:10

If any Member of this Legislative Assembly can say that they have not heard of any problems with access to long-term care, then I think that perhaps they have not been picking up their phones enough, because the reality is there is an access problem to long-term care throughout this province, and we don't need to wait for the recommendations from the committee to tell us about that.

There's at least one other issue – because I know that there are other members who do want to speak very badly to this particular motion for a return – and that is something that I heard recently, that the Member for Redwater doesn't want to hear about current problems in long-term care. He only wants to hear about problems that are 15 to 20 years down the road. You know what, Mr. Speaker? People want to talk about those problems now.

Now, maybe he doesn't want to hear about the problems that are occurring at this point in time because the report that the minister has in his hands and has not released, despite many questions from the opposition party on this particular report, maybe deals with it. If in fact it does, then I believe there is a responsibility on this minister and this government to ensure that all Albertans know what's in that report.

Mr. Speaker, can anyone tell the Official Opposition why it would be kept a secret? What is in that report that the minister has refused to release until this point in time? What could be so terrible in a report, that should be a public report, that up to this point in time it has not been released other than in bits and pieces perhaps. As I indicated, there are some dollars that have come as a result of the report, so to my mind that would be good, and the minister would want to release the report, would want people to look at it, would want people to make an assessment as to what, in effect, are the recommendations. Because – and this should make all of us sit up and pay attention – in about 20 to 25 years most Members of this Legislative Assembly may be using those facilities or any new kind of care that might be provided with regards to long-term care.

So if I can, for just now, sum up. This is a report that is important for citizens to be able to comment on what the ongoing consultations are that the Member for Redwater is putting forward. This is an important report for individuals to know what is being planned by this government with regards to long-term care, and there seems to be no reason that I can see, no logical reason from either the point of confidentiality, from either the point of a breach of trust, from either the point of a contract having been made with a private organization and therefore it's not the property of the Legislative Assembly. There is, in fact, no logical reason for not allowing this report to be made public, and I'm very interested to hear the reasons that the minister may put forward as to why this report will not be made public. If it will, then I congratulate the minister in advance for providing that information finally.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, you know, I find it's actually quite an amazing set of statements that I've just heard in favour of the member across the way wanting to have this motion for a return accepted.

On the one hand, Mr. Speaker, she implies that the chair of the committee is not attending the meetings, and I don't know anybody

that's worked harder on a committee and attended more meetings in a consultation process in recent times. Secondly, there seems to be some implication in the remarks that the committee is perhaps not qualified, not meeting with enough people. You know, I suppose if we gave the list of all the consultations that they've held, then I guess the members across the way would say: well, we're spending too much time at meetings and spending money on meetings. You know, Mr. Speaker, with that particular point of view being taken towards the long-term review committee, you would wonder why they're interested at all in what they're going to come up with in terms of recommendations, but they do seem to still be interested.

Mr. Speaker, because of the type of remark that was made, I do want to just indicate that in my view the committee, which has two members of this Assembly on it, one being the chair, from the constituency of Redwater, has been working very hard. On that committee are well-qualified and well-respected people who are knowledgeable about the current long-term care system in this province, and also I think they are people who are looking down the road to the future in terms of the increasing need that there will be in this province for long-term care, home care, supports for our aging population.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the other thing here is that when the long-term care review committee was established, it was made clear that their report would be due in November of 1999. When that report is completed – and I'm sure it will be a major report, a very important report to planning for long-term care in the decade ahead – it will certainly be presented to the minister, but I can guarantee that report will be made public and you won't have to wait for any motion for a return.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this moment in time there is no long-term care report as laid out as being the ultimate result or product of the long-term care review committee. It is correct that the minister has received advice on some questions that have been posed to the committee with respect to data and information on some issues that involve my work as minister and dealing with long-term care on an ongoing basis, working towards budget preparations, and so forth.

That is the situation, and therefore I recommend rejecting this particular motion for a return.

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

MR. DICKSON: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Why would the minister not have released an interim report? I went to a consultation in Calgary a number of weeks ago of the Member for Redwater's group, and what was fascinating to me was that there were a large number of Calgary seniors there, and they were worried about what's happening in terms of their care this month, next month, the next six months, next year. What was happening was that the review facilitators from Community Development kept coming back and saying: we're not talking about what's not working now for seniors; think down the road.

I remember saying to the people at my table: it is wonderful that all of these Calgary seniors have come together to plan my care. I'm 50 years old, and they're developing a system for me for 20 or 30 years down the road, and that's wonderful. But I think these people are more interested in what impact it's going to have on their lives right now.

That's what I think is so darn frustrating with the report not being released, Mr. Speaker. We know that all of the consultation with the regional health authorities, with advocacy groups was completed by the end of 1998. The process going on now should in no way impede delivery of an interim report, and that would provide us with some assistance.

What we know the minister is being told is that the \$3,000 a month currently available for home care is inadequate and that there has to be more flexibility. There has to be way of addressing the cost of prescription medication for seniors when they're discharged from a hospital and in their own home. There have to be provisions for convalescent care for seniors who are now occupying an acute care bed in Calgary. We have about 250 people who really belong in long-term care beds and can't access them. We need convalescent care so people can leave hospital, spend a period of time, as they do in Europe, in a convalescent facility, and then go back to their own apartment rather than going into a long-term care facility.

Those are all immediate and pressing needs. They cannot wait another year while we decide the seniors' long-term care plan for people of my age. We need some immediate action for those people who have issues right now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health, there's no opportunity for you to respond during this debate under the rules we have.

The hon. Member of Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very disappointed that the Minister of Health would not be willing to release this report from August, and I do urge the minister to reconsider this. As the fairly recently appointed opposition critic on women's issues I, of course, am intensely interested in this report. I understand that there was a report, so I'm wondering if history is being rewritten a bit when now there seems not to have been a report. My understanding was that there was indeed a report that was presented.

We're in the middle of budget debates, and I notice that in the budget plans, government and ministry business plans, in the estimate books there are a number of programs that are obviously being put in place as a result of some information the government has received. Again, I'm a process-oriented person, and this I find very interesting. Obviously there has been information shared. There is a report there. I'm assuming this falls from it. There have been decisions made and money allotted to programs. Why, then, is it so difficult to actually release the information that this flowed from?

I mean, public consultation is a looping process, and the members of the Liberal opposition are more than willing to be helpful to the government, want to be helpful to the government in helping get feedback on these reports. Once you do a public consultation, you want to feed back that information to the people that you spoke with to say: "Is this indeed what you said? Did we capture what you were saying?" At the same time you want to also be putting that same information out to as many groups of people as possible, and that's where all Members of the Legislative Assembly work together to disseminate this information and gather feedback in again. I'm not sure if government members are privy to this report that was received in August. Perhaps they've been doing the loop with the information into their communities, but you're missing a sizable workforce here to assist you in getting feedback on this.

The long-term care committee has information that is of great interest to the constituents of Edmonton-Centre. I have a very large seniors population living there. They want to know specifically what plans are being considered by the government and be able to give that information back and give their feedback to it. But they also want to be able to make plans for their own lives, and they're waiting for this.

You know, I had somewhat facetiously made a joke that the long-

term care committee was in need of long-term care. It was established in '96. No. It couldn't be a joke. I'm a feminist. I have no sense of humour. It was established in '96, and there was this report produced in August of '98, and now we're hearing that there will be a final report in the fall of '99. I would like to see a commitment from the minister that that report will be released, but I do continue to urge the Minister of Health to give us the interim report if that's what we're going to call the August report.

I mean, I'd like to know: what were the benchmarks that are being established here? What sort of key performance indicators are being expected or worked into that result in all of the plans that we see in these budget books? We need to be able to scrutinize what these plans are based on, the information that it came from. Is what's being recommended indeed being put forward by the government? That's part of the give-and-take in the scrutiny process of this Assembly. What are the outcomes that were recommended? What were the inputs that were recommended?

My colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has a number of times raised issues around the boundaries. It's still not resolved. We still don't have any additional information.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. I should have been on that committee.

MS BLAKEMAN: She would have been an excellent person to be on that committee. She seems to deal with it a lot.

Who in fact were the people that the hon. Member for Redwater was meeting with? I've heard health authorities mentioned. I've heard some advocacy groups mentioned. Was he meeting with frontline workers? Has he met with nurses? I know that they were expressing a strong, keen interest to be able to share their experiences. Again, if you're looking for information on what works and what doesn't work, go to the frontline people that actually do this every day. They have the information. They're more than willing to share it and help out. Is that information included in this and captured in this report or interim report or however the minister chooses to talk about it? There was information received there, and I presume there have been decisions made as a result of it. What are the decisions? What was the information?

MR. BONNER: Seniors have been studied more than any other group in Alberta.

MS BLAKEMAN: Some of my colleagues are saying that seniors have been studied more than any other group in Alberta and that some reports on them have been shredded. Yes. I'll take that point.

I'm looking forward to the information that is coming out of the long-term care committee and also out of Aging Alberta, a benchmark report that's being chaired by the Member for Calgary . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: West.

MS BLAKEMAN: West. Thank you very much.

This is a huge change in our demographics in this country. We did not capture and understand what the baby boomers were going to do as they moved through their teen years and into their working years. What's going to happen as they move into the senior years? This is probably the biggest demographic move that's going to affect every department in this government as well. So why is there a reluctance to share this information?

MRS. SOETAERT: They don't want to answer questions on it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, they don't want to answer questions on it.

I am still an optimist. I'm still believing that the best intentions of the government . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm being laughed at by my colleagues for that one. Come on, Mr. Minister, help me out here.

You know, I have an excellent organization in my constituency, West Edmonton Seniors. They disseminate information to the people that come in there. They develop advocacy. There's the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. There's the Alberta Council on Aging. There are a number of ad hoc and long-term, smaller, sort of grassroots committees that have been meeting that are all looking for this information. So I am baffled as to why the minister would not be willing to share this information. I recognize that as part of this process we're in right now, he's neglected to

include that information in his opportunity to speak, and now we will not know why he's chosen that.

I think this is one of the most important things to happen to us as legislators with this aging population and particularly in the area of long-term care. Next to acute care this is where we really need to be looking after people. This is, frankly, if I'm understanding it, where a lot of money is spent. How are we managing this? Why are we making choices in this way?

I see that the Speaker has risen.

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

