

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 27, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/04/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity.

May our first concern be for the good of all our people.

Guide our deliberations this day.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Peace River, Charlie Penson. Charlie serves one of the largest geographical constituencies in Canada as well as one of the largest population-based constituencies. He was first elected in 1993 and subsequently was re-elected in 1997. He serves on the Reform shadow cabinet, representing international trade. At this time he is seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'd ask that Mr. Penson rise and receive the usual warm and cordial welcome of this Legislature.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw to present a petition supporting public and separate schools with 15 names.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd present a petition from Lethbridge and Vulcan and the Champion area urging the government of Alberta

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 Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition sponsored by the SOS parents signed by 104 people living around Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. They are 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 Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to present a petition from parents at Nickle junior high school, Lake Bonavista Drive, in southeast Calgary signed by 97 Calgaryans and also expressing the need for increased

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.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to present a petition on behalf of 115 Edmontonians that also on behalf of the SOS group urges

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.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 206 and 210.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 207, 208, and 209.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to file with the Legislative Assembly copies of a letter sent to the Stony Plain Eagles, who won the 1999 senior men's hockey championship, the Allan Cup, in their hometown of Stony Plain.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table responses to specific questions by hon. members at our recent ministry hearings with the Committee of Supply on Wednesday, March 24, and Monday, April 12.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table five copies of the annual report of the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists, as well five copies of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta annual report.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is from Dellas McKee in Calgary indicating some of the problems that person has had with our health care system.

The second is a letter from Dr. Rollie Nichol to Premier Ralph Klein with regards to Bill 7, and it indicates that if the Calgary regional health authority is to build a relationship with physicians, this bill needs to be withdrawn.

The third is from the acting chief of the Calgary fire department, Mr. Murray Castle, to the chair of the professions and occupations committee indicating that there are concerns with regards to Bill 22,

especially of the adverse impact on Calgary which may cost upwards of a million dollars.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and table before the Legislative Assembly the itinerary of the 1999 Alberta Prairie Province Conference on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome entitled Together Let's Find a Solution, from May 4 to May 7. We already have over 700 registrants at this conference, ranging from Bermuda to Newfoundland to Quebec.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Public Health Advisory and Appeal Board for the year August 1, 1998, to February 3, 1999.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from the World Wildlife Fund to the Premier of this province talking about this province's very poor performance in terms of protecting endangered spaces.

My next tabling is the F grade that this province received for the second year in a row from the World Wildlife Fund because of their inability to protect endangered spaces in this province.

The third tabling is the Summary of the 1998/1999 Progress Report on Protecting Canada's Wild Lands, which substantiates the F that this province got.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, do you have a tabling too? Please proceed.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file five copies of a document we got off the Net entitled Registry Agent's Product Catalogue. What this shows is the government fees for various services and private-sector fees, whether they're capped or uncapped.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have six copies of one document to table with the Assembly. It's a two-page document. The first page is a letter from the Minister of Health to me dated December 9, 1998, in which he answers my request for information regarding all of Alberta Health's fees and permit fees and licence fees.

The second page of the document is the schedule that the minister provided detailing the \$663,699,000 collected from Albertans in the form of health care insurance premiums, which the Minister of Health acknowledges are a fee.

Thank you.

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 more tablings from the WWF: Conservation Lands in Canada, expressing their concerns about endangered spaces campaign protection standards and, finally, a letter addressed to all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly from the world wildlife foundation expressing their concerns with this report.

1:40

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table a news release dated today from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees outlining what is going on with the third strike in this province at the moment in the Headwaters health region.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for children's services.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly some really great grade 8 students from Lesser Slave Lake. They attend Roland Michener secondary school in the beautiful town of Slave Lake. They are 45 students with five adults, and they're with their teachers, Mrs. Susan Giesbrecht and Mr. Glen Pope and parent helpers Ms Sherry Kasper, Miss Shawna Auger, and Mrs. Patsy Hartman. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly visitors from Tofield school, home of the Snow Goose Festival, 46 students accompanied by teachers Mr. Mike Sawchenko and Mr. Brian Lyons. We have a sign interpreter, Mrs. Linda Fraese, and parent helper Mrs. Debbie Kortzman. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

### Education Funding

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the imposition of the disputes inquiry board on the Calgary board of education and its teachers the government has bought itself some time. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What will the cabinet do in the next four weeks to ensure that children do not return to school in the fall with fewer teachers and overcrowded classrooms?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the DIB process is intended to ensure that the parties continue to have an opportunity to speak with one another. The main issue which has come up in contract negotiations or the point of contention is the pupil/teacher ratio, which is what the union wants, and classroom size caps, which is what the school board has put on the table. The school board has made an offer for a 26 cap at the elementary level, 28 at junior high, and 30 at the senior high level. I think that's a very responsible reaction to what parents in Calgary are saying, as well as the Leader of the Opposition, that maintaining a cap on classroom sizes is important. That is one thing the board has in its policy purview to take care of, but in the interim we'll continue to encourage the parties to speak with one another.

With respect to this fall, which is what the Leader of the Opposition was referring to, we certainly have made our commitment to increasing funding for education including the area of the basic instructional grant, which includes teachers' salaries, Mr. Speaker. Really, this issue is about PTR versus classroom size. In my strong opinion PTR is for the benefit of the union, but caps on classroom sizes are for the benefit of students and teachers.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, as the minister already has a committee in place to review the allocation of existing funds, will the minister now expand the mandate of that committee to look at the inadequacy of education funding in this province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we spend a great deal of time addressing the issue of the cost of education. We think that the amount we have reinvested in the past four years, an amount which totals nearly \$400 million, combined with a new investment of \$600 million over the next three years, of almost a billion dollars over a six-year period, roughly 36 percent over a six-year period, is far greater than the rate of inflation and the rate of growth of the number of students.

With respect to other areas we've put money into English as a Second Language and expanded our programs in that area. We've expanded programs and created new programs such as the early literacy initiative. We've put \$10 million into adding more teacher aides throughout the province. We've increased spending on special-needs students by 30 percent commencing in September of the current school year. Those things have received a great deal of positive reaction from members of the stakeholder communities in the area of education.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we're always prepared to keep looking at these matters, but certainly a \$1 billion investment over the last six years is a great deal of money.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that for the last four years parents, teachers, students, school councils, school board trustees, and the Official Opposition have been saying that children in publicly funded schools in this province are shortchanged, will the minister finally listen now that a business leader is telling him exactly the same thing?

MR. MAR: I'll say this, Mr. Speaker, about Mr. Newell's comments: I agree with much of what he says. I believe that education is important. I believe that people in this government believe that education is important, but it is very important to know that we have responded to people who have said that we require more money in education. I've agreed. Our caucus has agreed. That's why our spending is going up and our investment is getting higher.

I would remind hon. members that commencing this fall, when the student instructional grant rate goes up by \$116 per student, that will bring our per student instructional grant to nearly \$4,000. That is just for instruction. That does not include administration. It does not include transportation. It does not include capital. It does not include a number of other things, but what it does say is that we are investing \$100,000 for every classroom size of 26. That is a great deal of investment.

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

#### Protected Ecological Areas

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. "Alberta is endowed with one of the finest arrays of wild lands and wild creatures in the entire

world," to quote from the internationally recognized World Wildlife Fund, but the World Wildlife Fund leaders including Prince Philip have again given Alberta an F -- an F -- a failing grade for the second year in a row for this government's failure to protect endangered spaces. Despite efforts by industry and environmental groups to work together, the government has lost touch with what Albertans want. My questions are to the Acting Premier. What excuse has this government to offer?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, this government takes very seriously the protection of all lands including Crown lands. We take that seriously because in fact it is something that's important to all Canadians and also to Her Majesty.

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't let those comments go without an answer. The fact is that she's trying to mislead the people of Alberta into believing that Prince Philip has anything to do with the rating. The fact is that this is based out of Toronto.

If you can figure out the rationale: why did Ontario get a B and Alberta an F when in fact Ontario hasn't done anything except to commit to protecting 12 percent of 40 percent of their land base? In fact, in Alberta we have now increased the protected area by 60 percent under the program. We've also got things like the five UNESCO sites in Alberta. There are only 12 of them in Canada, five of them in Alberta. We rate second in the percentage of land set aside, second in Canada; we're at 10.2. Ontario, once they've finished, if they finish, if they do anything, if they do their 40 percent, will only have nine. We've got 10.2. They get a B; we get an F. How do you figure that one out?

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Well, there's the excuse, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the federal government has protected 8 percent of provincial land and the province has protected less than 2 percent, when is the province going to make up the other 2 percent in order to meet the international goal?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we currently have about 30 sites out to local committees. We have another 27 under consideration, so in fact another 27 sites are coming. By the time this program is completed we will in fact have a representative sample of all of the natural regions within the province.

In her first preamble she talked about industry working with environmentalists to accommodate the special places. I'm wondering what it is she's referring to. If it's the agreement that CAPP had, it's a great agreement: you've got one group that has no money, you've got another group that has some dispositions, and the government, who would have to pay to implement this program, wasn't even invited to the table. That's quite an agreement.

MRS. MacBETH: Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

What plans does this government have to double the protected spaces in the next 12 months in order to meet the promise the Alberta government made to Albertans and to the world in 1992?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that in 1992 there was a target set, and all along we have said that at the end of the program we would have a representative sample of the six natural regions and the 20 subregions within this province. We're on target to achieve that.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House and the members on the left of the folks over there believe in public consultation. We don't believe, as your kissin' cousins in Ottawa do, that you impose from

the top. We don't believe in that process. We believe in public consultation and the local people having input.

THE SPEAKER: I think you've spent enough time on this one.

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Health Care Premiums

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government brought in legislation that would freeze and preserve its user-fee taxes pending a review that should have happened years ago, but the government forgot to include the one user fee that makes up over 52 percent of all of the user paid taxes that are collected in Alberta; namely, the special tax called health care insurance premiums. In the past seven years this government has increased health care taxes by \$259 million, or over 60 percent. Given the Treasurer's claim that user fees have been adjusted to correspond with population increases, can he explain why health care premiums went up 37 percent between 1992 and 1996 when Alberta's population only increased by 3.5 percent?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, one of the things the opposition is refusing to acknowledge is that we are the only province in Canada that is doing a sweeping and comprehensive review of all our fees, and it is not because we have been ordered to do so by the courts. It is not because of that. We want to review all fees to see which ones are appropriate and to see which can be reviewed.

I think it's fascinating, the history lesson he just took us on in terms of increasing fees, because when his leader was the Minister of Health, she raised health care premiums in one year, in 1990, by 16 percent. The leader of the Liberal opposition went on to say that she believed Albertans being asked to pay this additional amount per month, was appropriate and reasonable. An increase of 16 percent in one year. This government will not be doing that.

MR. SAPERS: I wasn't in cabinet then; the Treasurer was. What did you do about it, Mr. Treasurer?

Will you confirm that the reason why health care premiums are not included in the user-fee preservation legislation is that the government knows in fact that these are taxes and has no intent to lighten this regressive burden from the backs of Alberta taxpayers?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, again we made it very clear yesterday -- and it's something that for reasons I don't understand the opposition chooses to ignore -- that with a committee in place to work on this particular exercise and to receive input from the opposition -- we have received some -- we are reviewing all fees, and that includes health care premiums.

I'm not saying health care premiums are going to go down, but I can tell you what, Mr. Speaker: they're not going to go up by 50 percent, which was the target that was set by the hon. Leader of the Opposition when she was Health minister. She said that in fact it was going to be 50 percent of the basic cost. Fifty percent. We're holding the line at 15 percent. She wanted to raise costs of health care premiums 50 percent.

MR. SAPERS: Well, given that the Leader of the Official Opposition won an award for managing expenses and expenditure when she was Minister of Health, maybe the Treasurer would like to tell us how he can continue to justify collecting the current -- try to keep up with us -- health care premium taxes when the revenue raised is \$690 million but the cost of collection is only \$11 million.

MR. DAY: You know, now that's a great suggestion: to look at administrative costs of taking those premiums in. I think that's a good suggestion. I hope that's something that the committee will do. That's a positive move.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, what we won't be doing. We won't be removing \$7 million in pharmaceutical products that were available for seniors. That's what the Leader of the Opposition did when she was Health minister. Seven million dollars in pharmaceuticals: she took them off the list. We won't be doing that. We'll be looking at the fees for appropriateness, and I'll take into consideration this good suggestion to look at administrative costs.

### User Fees

MS BARRETT: You know, the privatized nature of most government services means that untold millions of dollars in user fees are going unaccounted for. As a matter of fact, there's absolutely no reference in Bill 35 to identify the charges that are subject to markups by the private, for-profit deliverers of government services. In some cases, as I pointed out in tablings, the user fees are capped, but in a lot of cases the sky is the limit. So I'd like to ask the Treasurer how his government can justify reviewing only those fees and charges that are flowing into government coffers while ignoring the appropriateness of the hundreds of service fees charged by the private corporations who provide registry and other services to consumers?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, if the member of the ND opposition has other areas that she believes deserve consideration, then we'll be happy to take that under consideration.

MS BARRETT: So when private corporations make a profit delivering government services like vital statistics which exceed the actual cost of the service, is the Treasurer saying now that this bill will be expanded so consumers can find out whether or not they're being hosed?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think she heard me correctly. The legislation covers some 800 user fees that bring money into the general revenue fund of this province. We also have a committee in place to look at matters that would go even beyond that. If the leader of the ND opposition has some other areas that she feels are worthy of consideration, bring that forward, and we'll take a look.

MS BARRETT: Well, evidently, Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer is very confident that Albertans are not being gouged by the add-on charges, so I'd ask him now: why is he unwilling to have these contained in Bill 35? Why can't Albertans find out whether or not the private-sector charges on government services are fair or if we're being gouged?

MR. DAY: Well, I'll try one more time. We are going to look at the appropriateness of all fees. The committee has the ability to do that, and if the member has some fees and some collections that she feels are worthy of consideration and further study, then let's do it. That's part of the exercise. Absolutely. Let's do that.

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

2:00

### Bowden Refinery

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. The Blood

tribe is considering the purchase of the Bowden refinery from Parkland Industries. I've had a number of calls from constituents concerning this issue. My question is: what is the status of negotiations?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a good question from the hon. member. The Bowden refinery project is a very innovative and interesting project undertaken by the Blood tribe. In April 1997 the federal government concluded a land claims settlement with the Blood tribe providing them with some \$2.3 million with which they could purchase about 440 acres of land to be set aside as reserve. Unfortunately, in that settlement the province was not consulted or included in the process. We are currently being included in that type of settlement discussion even though the province doesn't have a role in terms of bringing forward Crown land for those types of settlements.

However, the discussion relating to the refinery itself is of very significant importance to Alberta, particularly because if that project goes ahead, it will result in questions as to who deals with the environmental impact relating to the refinery and the operation of the refinery. There are questions relating to municipal assessment and how the municipality interrelates with that particular property.

So we've been involved. We've been engaged in the discussions. The discussions are primarily happening between the Blood tribe and the federal government as it relates to taxation issues and conversion to reserve, but the province is involved in the discussion both with the federal government and the Blood tribe. Also, I've made a commitment to the municipality that we'll engage in discussions with them and keep them apprised as to what's happening.

MR. SEVERTSON: My first supplementary: what role is the province playing in reference to environmental standards, that area?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, if the land is indeed transferred into reserve status, then the provincial laws relating to things like environmental standards will not have applicability on those lands, so it's very important that we have a commitment from the federal government now before lands are converted to reserve status that they will consult with both the province and with the municipality.

We are certainly engaged in that discussion insofar as it relates to how provincial environmental standards will be continued with respect to both the operation and the potential reclamation of that land and also with respect to other impacts that transferring that land to reserve status might have on the municipality.

MR. SEVERTSON: My final supplementary: what is the implication for taxation if that goes to a reserve?

MR. HANCOCK: With respect to municipal taxation, one of the conditions that we've put in place and that the Blood tribe has agreed to is that prior to any transfer of the land's reserve status, there will be an agreement which will in essence provide the equivalent of the amount of taxation to the municipality involved as they would garner in its current status, because of course there wouldn't be municipal taxation applicable against that land in reserve status.

With respect to provincial taxes, other than perhaps income tax there would be little concern for us. Most of the taxes that we collect are at the pump, so they would be off reserve in any event. There is a concern with respect to federal excise tax, and that's currently I think the major stumbling block that the Blood tribe and the federal government are negotiating on, and we're not really involved in that discussion.

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

#### Michener Centre

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents and board members of the Michener Centre are living a yo-yo existence. First, the board is instructed to create a development plan for the site. The minister, upon receipt of the plan, creates a different committee to review the report. The committee, rather than reviewing the report, recommends the creation of a not-for-profit agency that would replace the Michener board. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Why has the minister muzzled the Michener board, instructing them not to go public or in any way consult with stakeholders?

DR. OBERG: I haven't.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister explain how the proposed not-for-profit agency will coexist with the continued operation of the Michener board and centre?

DR. OBERG: There has not been a proposed not-for-profit society.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Isn't it true, Mr. Minister, that you are secretly holding a proposal to sell off lands from Michener Centre to a private developer?

DR. OBERG: No.

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

#### Highway Cleanup Program

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Albertans are proud of the beauty of their province, and tourists often comment about the cleanliness of our roadways. During the annual highway cleanup that takes place about this time each year, Albertans see thousands of volunteers picking up litter along the primary highways. This raises a question in my mind about the safety of our young people during this event. Will the Minister of Transportation and Utilities ensure that the safety of these volunteers is not compromised?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the department plays such a leadership role as far as promoting and maintaining a clean environment in this province, especially along the roadways, and indeed safety is very, very much a key component of this overall process.

The department provides organizations with manuals where the leaders are basically instructed on how to conduct proper roadway cleanup to see that those that are participating are participating in a safety conscious type of manner. As far as visibility is concerned, the volunteers as well as the young people that are busy keeping the roads clean are dressed appropriately in bright orange vests and are instructed to stay off the highways as well as off the sides of the roads. Signs are placed along the roads to warn people, warn drivers along the roads that indeed the cleanup is in progress. Radio commercials are run on a regular basis the day before as well as the day that the activities are taking place, and the RCMP support this particular project through enforcement. So overall every effort that is possible is made to see that our roads are safe while our young people are practicing good environmental practices.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister: how many volunteers are expected to take part in this event across the province?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: This is a huge initiative, Mr. Speaker, in that we have over 11,000 of our young people, 11,000 of our 4-H, of our forest wardens, of those groups who indeed are the future citizens of this province, who recognize the need of a clean roadway as far as tourism, as far as the clean atmosphere of this province are concerned. These 11,000 represent some 429 organizations. They clean some 6,600 kilometres of road, and ultimately last year, in 1998, this ended up in 51,000 bags of litter. The program has been very successful through the years, and indeed we expect the same level of participation this year. The total cost of this initiative is over \$200,000.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister: in view of the good comments that we've heard, has Alberta been recognized beyond its borders for the work it has been doing on this annual highway cleanup?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It has, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, and it's received the . . . [interjections] The hon. members across the way may think this is funny, but it's not humorous at all. This is a true achievement, and something that is recognized by the Clean World award that was provided by Pitch-In Canada this past year. This is an outstanding award that indeed identifies and recognizes the good work of this particular program. His Excellency the Rt. Hon. Romeo LeBlanc, Governor General of Canada and patron of Pitch-In Canada, approved this award. It's a very significant award, and even though the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert may be thinking that this is a bit humorous, this is indeed a very monumental type of award.

MRS. SOETAERT: Point of order.

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

## 2:10                    **Advanced Education System**

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of 18 major Canadian universities the University of Alberta ranks 16th in terms of instructors' salaries and the University of Calgary ranks dead last: not my words but the words of a leading Alberta businessman who went on to warn that the underfunding of education will dim the province's hopes for a bright future. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. What actions has the minister taken to ensure that instructors' salaries will be competitive?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we of course have the responsibility of funding postsecondary education, but the board of governors make the specific decisions in that particular area. I'd just like to remind the hon. member, however, that in this year's business plan for this first year of that three-year cycle, we actually increased funding to the postsecondaries by something in the order of 8 percent. How that will be incorporated into salaries of course is for them to determine.

I'd also again point out to the hon. member that we have a tremendous, I think, incentive within the system, and it's called the performance funding envelope. I don't know of any other area but faculty that can have more impact in that particular area on behalf of the institution than the ability to teach, to train, and of course to

counsel students and position them for the future.

So we think that a job is being done in that particular area. We're not unaware of salary comparisons at this particular time. It's been identified as a concern by our department, and we'll continue to work at it as best we can.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what action has the minister taken to ensure that the University of Calgary's library and academic libraries across the province meet the highest standards?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the areas that we've recently been complimented on is the Knowledge Network. We've been able to work both with the institutions and as a matter of fact with libraries right across the province to integrate the materials that are available at the particular libraries.

I don't know where this places us in terms of the world, Mr. Speaker, but certainly in terms of the jurisdictions that we compete mostly with, which of course is here in Canada, these sorts of moves are positioning Alberta in an extremely advantageous situation, to the point now where we're starting to have outsiders around the world look at our ability to provide an Alberta library that is not only open and accessible of course to an individual student at the University of Alberta or at the University of Calgary, but if you can imagine this, someone who currently lives in Milk River, Alberta, can go into their library and start to try to gain access, then, to all this vast array of library material that we have throughout this province. It's just an excellent, excellent initiative, and I appreciate the hon. member raising it today so I could talk further about it.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what action has the minister taken to ensure that the laboratories, classrooms, and other postsecondary facilities that draw top scholars are maintained and improved?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I think people should understand today that I didn't write these questions for the hon. member, and this is . . .

DR. MASSEY: You haven't answered mine yet.

MR. DUNFORD: I missed the interjection. Did you want to make it again?

Well, he points out the research end of things. I'd like to again advise the hon. member, because he's a keen observer of our business plan, that not only with the research excellence envelope but with the I2P2 program, the intellectual infrastructure partnership program, we're actually providing quite a number of dollars into the particular area. We're trying to do a couple of things with those programs, Mr. Speaker. We're not only trying to provide up-to-date, state-of-the-art equipment, but we're trying to retain but also again attract some of the highest calibre researchers that this country has to offer.

THE SPEAKER: Provincial Treasurer, did you want to supplement?

MR. DAY: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Supplementary to the question, both his supplementary and his main question in terms of attracting researchers and attracting professors to the province, a report that was published this weekend clearly shows that the average salary of professors after tax is in fact third highest in the country. So to say that they are at the bottom of 16 is not quite accurate. In fact, they're third highest in the country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Physician Recruitment

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of areas in our province which are currently experiencing a mini economic boom, if I might use the word. Examples of this are seen in such cities as Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and Calgary. While this increased economic activity and population rate has certainly many positive sides, it does have an effect on services and programs in communities in other areas of the province such as Brooks and the Crownsnest Pass, and this includes access to physician services. My questions today are to the Minister of Health. Could the minister advise the Assembly whether there are adequate numbers of physicians in the province to meet the needs of our growing population?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the member has identified a major challenge for the health care system in this province as our population grows and ages. We have under way a number of initiatives, one through the rural physician action plan with regards to the recruitment of physicians to the province. Over the last number of months we've been successful in recruiting approximately 70 physicians to rural locations in the province in need of their service and expertise. Also overall, according to the latest statistics -- and those would be verified by the Alberta Medical Association -- we have an additional 200 physicians practicing in the province.

I must be quite clear here, Mr. Speaker. We are responding and we are working on this particular issue, but there are areas of specific specialties, and there are some parts of the province that are underserved in terms of physician supply.

MR. COUTTS: My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Health. Given that there are a number of areas in the province with increasing populations, what steps are in place to deal with future demands for physician services?

MR. JONSON: Well, in addition to the rural physician action plan, Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity in the course of our recent negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association to agree with them to put in place a physician resource planning process. We are working through a committee set up through that agreement on the overall needs as far as physicians are concerned in the province and strategies with respect to recruiting same.

MR. COUTTS: My last question is also to the Minister of Health. Since salary and working conditions are often cited as reasons for entering into a specific profession, can the minister please tell us what is being done to examine different ways of paying and delivering physician services? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Actually the hon. Minister of Health does have the floor.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do have a number of innovative initiatives in the province with respect to physician utilization. In the cities we have CHOICE, a project in north Edmonton where you have an overall team working together in serving the needs of seniors, and in that particular setting you have a whole variety of support personnel and professionals working together. They use a different payment model. I guess some would say that it's a salary or contract basis rather than a fee-for-service basis. As another

example, in Calgary we have the control of chronic pain program, where you have again a different approach to the remuneration of physicians.

2:20

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, with about another 10 or 12 such initiatives across the province. We are certainly aware that we do need to be forward thinking and innovative in terms of looking at the future needs of patients and the working arrangements for doctors.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc.

### Campground Policing

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In remote locations the private-sector operators of provincial campgrounds are faced with serious problems from random campers like stealing wood, leaving litter like animal carcasses and couches, and sometimes causing a disturbance. As there are so few staff and each park ranger is responsible for thousands of square miles, operators couldn't get help last year with these problems, and this year there will be even fewer park rangers in some areas. Will the Minister of Environmental Protection ensure this summer that at least a few seasonal park rangers are properly trained in law enforcement so they can follow up and lay charges and have the mandate to do so when thefts or other infringements are reported?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has identified an issue that we have been very concerned about. There's not an easy answer to the problem. As far as having fewer park rangers, we are setting up a new system whereby we have conservation officers. What that means is that the current fish and wildlife officers will become conservation officers along with the park rangers, so the some 220 fish and wildlife officers that we have in the province will be helping in the patrolling of the campgrounds. Of course, when you look at the workload of the fish and wildlife officers, they have a busy season in the spring and another one in the fall when they have an extra load, and in the parks of course it's during the summer. So by amalgamating the two and establishing a conservation officer, we will actually have more people in the field and be able to help in this patrolling of the campgrounds.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Energy's proposal for more guns won't work, will the Minister of Environmental Protection please reinstate the one and a half kilometre boundary around provincial campgrounds to prevent some of these problems?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know when the Minister of Energy has proposed that there be more guns. I don't know where on earth that came from. That's once again trying to impute false motives, so I really take exception to that comment.

As far as putting in the inability to random camp within a certain area, no, we are not going to implement that.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, having more conservation officers and park rangers patrolling won't solve the problem if they don't have the mandate to lay charges and they don't aggressively move forward on this point this year. Will the minister ensure that those people in the field have the mandate to lay charges this summer?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the problems we have that we are overcoming -- in the past the park rangers did not have the ability to stop someone outside the park. Once they become

conservation officers, they will have that ability. So it will help as far as the ability to stop people once they're outside the park or outside the campground.

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

### **Agricultural Trade Dispute**

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the fall Alberta farmers faced interference with getting their cattle to markets in the United States. As a result of lobbying by U.S. cattle farmers, the United States government has launched countervail and antidumping investigations of the Canadian cattle industry. My question is to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. What is his department doing to defend the interests of Alberta farmers in these investigations?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, it should be clear that Alberta cattle are not being dumped into the United States, and federal and Alberta programs do not provide unfair subsidies. This particular complaint that the member is referring to was motivated by declines in commodity prices and by lower farm incomes in the United States rather than by subsidies or dumping.

We're working with the federal government, with Alberta Agriculture, and with farmers to develop a reply to the U.S. investigation. We have retained counsel in Washington, D.C., to act on our behalf with respect to this particular issue. It's a very serious issue, and we are responding seriously to it.

Our trade unit in Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs is very active in this particular matter. In addition, we have held discussions with the governors of the border states to try and find informal and more effective ways of resolving these issues before they get into full-blown disputes.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental. Ten years ago the Canada/U.S. free trade agreement came into force. To the same minister: if we have this agreement along with NAFTA, why is this sort of attack on our exports still permitted?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that the North American free trade agreement does not preclude this sort of action. This sort of action is being brought under U.S. federal law. However, NAFTA does provide for appeal mechanisms which we can use. As well, I should point out that we are actively working in terms of bringing this forward to the World Trade Organization and using their dispute resolution processes as well.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: My second supplemental, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will these investigations hurt the ability of our farmers to export cattle over the next year?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, they will, Mr. Speaker, if market and commodity prices remain weak, because U.S. purchasers may be concerned about potentially having to pay duties if the U.S. government follows the investigation with penalties and prior to an appeal being taken under the NAFTA rules. It points out, as well, the need for a long-term solution and the focus of the Alberta government towards encouraging our federal government and the U.S. government, working with the border state governors to try and encourage their government to enter into a true free trade agreement for agriculture across our borders.

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

### **Freedom of Information Legislation**

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Underfunding of Alberta schools has certainly been well documented, yet at the very same time we've seen a 60 percent increase in taxpayer dollars going into private schools. To add insult to injury, we now learn that private schools will not have to meet the same standards as public schools. My question is to the Minister of Labour. Why will the government not make private schools subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act? Why the double standard, Mr. Minister?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been through this issue before with the hon. member. We do not pick the heads of the school. There is a funding mechanism, but there's also a charter under which they operate. The answer that we gave the member previously still holds firm.

MR. DICKSON: My follow-up question would be to the Minister of Education. What goes on in private schools that warrants an exemption from the privacy act? What's going on there, Mr. Minister?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I wish to supplement the Minister of Labour with respect to the first question that was raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and that's with respect to the funding levels that are made available to private schools. The hon. member knows that the funding for charter schools and public schools and Catholic schools is at an instructional grant rate of roughly \$4,000. What we've done is in response to a large-scale public consultation process headed up by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. The hon. member knows that in fact the increase to private school funding, which was originally at 50 percent of the instructional grant rate for public schools, has now gone to 60 percent. That will be phased in over a two-year period. That's the first fallacy that I wish to point out in the matter raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

With respect to the rationale for the differences between public and private schools with respect to their obligations under the freedom of information act, I of course again defer to the response that has already been given by the hon. Minister of Labour.

2:30

MR. DICKSON: Well, my final question, Mr. Speaker, would go back to the Minister of Labour. Why is it that he chose to ignore virtually a unanimous recommendation from anyone who spoke to this point when they made representations to the select special committee? Why did he ignore the almost unanimous recommendation that private schools should be subject to the same threshold of accountability as public schools if taxpayer dollars are going into them?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, nobody on that side more than that member there knows legislative procedure. He knows that the bill was introduced yesterday. The bill is before the House. He has been a member of the select committee. Why isn't he now preparing his notes and taking ample opportunity to enter into the debate on the bill?

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



### Children's Forum

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An annual forum on children is one of the actions promised in the Alberta children's initiative. Last week it was announced that the first forum would be held this coming October and would be chaired by the Premier's wife, Colleen Klein, if I may add, a very capable individual. My questions are to the hon. minister responsible for children's services. After over four years of consulting with Albertans on services for children and families, why are you repeating the process with this forum?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it isn't a repeat of the community consultations. We did in fact ask the community to be involved in the initial part of what we call the redesign, and at that time we had many, many people, 12,000 people, involved in the process, and they gave us specific direction. Number one, they asked us to make sure that we designed a system where they would be involved, and with that system we have now appointed 18 regions to be able to take over the response in terms of the redesign.

Mr. Speaker, the other component that they asked us to be involved in is what they call integration. In that respect we had to look at what we needed to do, and the Alberta children's initiative certainly set out goals to be able to ensure that we did a number of things. We had four projects which we identified, and amongst those an additional project was the Alberta children's forum. That children's forum will give us guidance and provide us direction as to what we need to do in the future to meet children's and families' needs.

MR. BRODA: First supplemental, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: who will be asked to attend the forum?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand there was also a question yesterday in terms of who will be involved. We expect that about 150 to 200 people will be involved, and we are just figuring out the process as to how we're going to include those people who are interested in children. We need to make sure that we have some research component. We need to make sure that we have community components. We have to ensure that whatever happens, we will have the departments who have been involved in the integration of what's going to be good for children and families. I feel that that's probably one of the best ways for us to be able to ensure that whoever wants to be involved will be involved but to ensure that we do also get the kind of recommendations we'll need to carry on.

MR. BRODA: Second supplemental, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why wait for a forum to discuss these issues? Why not take action now?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd expect that from the . . . That wasn't the question I gave you.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I think it's very, very important to talk about what action is happening. First of all, we are taking action. This children's forum is to make sure that we build on the actions that have already been put forward. One of the areas that I want to talk about which is really key when we're talking about children and their needs in the families . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister, but again the question probably led that way. So, Clerk, why don't you call the next order.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Okay. In thirty seconds, hon. members, I'll call on three hon. members for Members' Statements today. We'll proceed first of all with the hon. Member for Calgary-West, then Edmonton-Mill Woods, then Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

### Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon in the Legislature to applaud our recent very successful Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. This event, a first annual, was held at the Alberta Legislature over two days with Friday, April 16, being the day of debate.

Just imagine 83 grade 10 students from all parts of Alberta with their intelligence, sincerity, and high energy level debating in this magnificent Chamber. It was a thrill to observe the proceedings from the visitors' gallery realizing that this initiative provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to 83 young Albertans fortunate to be able to attend. I understand that there were only six students represented from Calgary from a possible 21 constituencies. In the future I will work to ensure that there is full representation of students from Calgary.

Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament was a remarkable joint project of the Royal Canadian Legion and the Legislative Assembly Office. Commander and President Tom Barton served as Lieutenant Governor, and you, Mr. Speaker, presided as Speaker. The 83 students came to Edmonton to experience life as an MLA and learn about the parliamentary process by actually doing it. Each student was assigned to represent one of Alberta's constituencies.

During the session they debated a throne speech, participated in Oral Question Period, passed two government bills, one private member's bill, two motions, and a nonconfidence motion. Government bills created the position of environmental ombudsman and added a mandatory work experience component to the school curriculum. The Assembly also approved mandatory school uniforms, a citizenship awareness program, and cleaner power generation. Some defeated initiatives were to establish a four-day workweek, restrict teenage driving, and abolish postsecondary tuition fees.

Despite the fact that all the student MLAs were new to the political environment, they produced five and a half hours of lively debate and demonstrated their natural political deal-making. When it was all over, everyone was exhausted but enthusiastic about their experience.

I highly commend the partners in this joint project and anticipate full constituency representation at youth parliaments in the future. These students can surely be our leaders of tomorrow.

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

### Save Our Schools Petitions

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the next several days we will likely table in the Assembly the 10,000th citizen petition signature supporting increased funding to schools to cover the cost of contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools. The petition reflects a rising and assertive voice in Alberta politics, the voice of parents.

We hear their voice through the individual efforts of Edmonton parents like Cindy Joines, Cathy Staring Parrish, and Donna White, who started and are overseeing the SOS petition. We hear their voice through the efforts of Calgary parents Colleen Connelly, Joanne Cuthbertson, Val Foster, and Sharon Hester, participating in

organizations such as SPEAK and the Calgary Council of Home and School Associations. We hear their voice in representatives of the five parent councils who gathered in Edson, the 70 parent councils who gathered in Edmonton, and the 45 parent council representatives who met in Calgary. These parents, alarmed by increasing class sizes and the lack of textbooks and resources and the pressure on communities to fund-raise and to provide these essentials, are taking action.

Politics comes from the Greek word *politicos*, meaning of the citizen. In making their voices heard, they are making schools *politicos*, participating at the highest level, demanding that their government address the widespread concern for the children of this province.

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

### Intolerance to Christians

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of mine, immigrants to Canada and Alberta some years ago, have come to me on a couple of occasions concerned about the persecution of Christians in their homeland. They showed me a group picture of their family back home. With tears in their eyes they pointed to a number of members who were martyred because they were Christians.

Now right here in Canada, where 78 percent identify themselves as Christians, we seem to be seeing the same situation surfacing. A March 7, 1999, *Calgary Herald* headline reads:

Christians remain in the closet. If there's one thing that won't be tolerated in a "tolerant and pluralist society," it is Christianity, whose adherents have been jeered and sneered into silence.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, our own CBC has banned even the softest Christian advertising and aired a program that blasphemed Christ. Senator Ron Ghitter publicly insulted Christians. A B.C. judge declared that Christian beliefs must be barred from school policy. A government bureaucrat has ordered an Ontario Bible college to shut down. A reference to Christianity was banned at a recent Swissair crash memorial service. Revenue Canada has revoked the charitable status of Human Life International, Alliance for Life, and the challenge team for being too political, because they promote God's laws regarding love, life, and family. The list of intolerance to Christians continues to grow.

Mr. Speaker, we hear so much about tolerance today, and often enough we hear of intolerance to minorities. Well, this is a real switch. Now we are experiencing intolerance to a majority. Are we seeing a redefinition of democracy without debate?

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me on behalf of our colleague for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly 27

students from the Trochu Valley school. They are accompanied today by teachers Bill Cunningham and Brian Vokins and by parent Steve Strohschein. Our visitors are seated, I believe, in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've been advised that there will be two points of order raised.

First of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring to an exchange that occurred between the Minister of Environmental Protection and the Leader of the Opposition. The authorities I'd cite would be 23(j) under Standing Orders, "uses abusive or insulting language," and *Beauchesne* 485(1) and 486.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm advised that the Blues are not yet available, so all I can put to you is what I heard in the exchange. I believe that I heard the Minister of Environmental Protection accuse the Leader of the Opposition of misleading Albertans. Whether he said "misled" or "misleading," you may have better notes or a better memory than I do, sir, but I understood it to be "misleading."

The word "mislead" or derivatives of the word "mislead" appear on your list of unparliamentary phrases. There are in fact 13 citations for either the word "mislead" or derivatives of it. It's page 8 of the memorandum that you had kindly prepared and circulated before the commencement of the spring session. That is not the kind of language that brings credit to the Assembly, and certainly for that to be said directly to a specific member of the Assembly, to any member of the Assembly would be inappropriate.

So I'd draw that to your attention, Mr. Speaker, and ask for appropriate remedial action. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member has already said, it's difficult to deal with a point of order of this nature without having the Blues and the specific wording that was used in front of us. However, I would point out that while he is indeed accurate in indicating that there are occasions in which the use of the word "misleading" has been ruled unparliamentary, there are also under *Beauchesne* 490 indications that the use of the word "misleading" is not unparliamentary. I would submit to you that it's appropriate to use the term "misleading," if that's the word that was used, when you're attempting to describe a certain situation or set of facts.

I believe the discussion that was going on at that point was a discussion about the way an organization had published some information and the way that information was being interpreted to the public. In that particular situation, Mr. Speaker, I believe the use of the word would be appropriate and should not be declared unparliamentary.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there was certainly an exchange today. The Minister of Environmental Protection, as I recall, was providing a supplementary to a response that had already been given by the Provincial Treasurer, and the phraseology "mislead the people of Alberta" was used, in the Speaker's remembering of it. Arguably, they would become unparliamentary because they were directed at a particular member rather than a particular concept. However, the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection did not say "deliberately misleading," which would then be ruled thoroughly unparliamentary at any given time.

If hon. members had heard what I said at the first phase, that "mislead the people of Alberta," in my humble opinion -- well, the rules basically have been used at one time, okay, and at another time, not so okay. I think that quite frankly there could always be better phrases that could be found with respect to this. Sometimes connotations and implications aren't exactly the way we want to see them.

Now the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert on a point of order.

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives," and 23(h), "makes allegations against another member." In the minister's answer he says: across the way the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert thinks it's funny. Well, I mean, we've already been accused of having no humour over here. However, every time there's a comment that says brevity or to keep it short, the minister takes offence, blames me, saying: she doesn't take it seriously; she thinks it's funny.

I think the minister knows full well that I very much respect those volunteers and in fact have been involved, as he well knows, with the 4-H program and the cleaning of the highways. I very much support it. He knows that. So it would almost be misleading Albertans if he's going to say that I think it's funny. I think that's a very serious topic.

I do think the minister was going on and on. When asked about how many people are involved, he tells us how much garbage was picked up, how many bags of garbage, how many miles done. I know that's interesting information, but truly when we have serious issues in this Assembly about many other things, I think brevity would be accepted. But when we say that, he gets upset and makes the comment: the member thinks it's funny. I don't think it's funny. I think it's a very important project that our young people are involved in, and I very much support it, and he knows . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Why were you laughing then?

MRS. SOETAERT: I wasn't laughing at that. If I was laughing, it might have been at the length of his answer but certainly not at the issue.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities on this point of order.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, we were dealing with an issue that is an international recognition of this particular program. This international recognition is one that is indeed held in very, very high esteem. This particular award has been there since 1976. This is the first time that the Alberta program has been recognized. It's a very serious recognition. It's one that this province holds in high esteem; it's one that this country holds in very high esteem. To be making light of such a highly esteemed program is something that I find very difficult to accept.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to know that in the hon. member's constituency this program is taken very seriously as well, and making catcalls and laughing at this type of a program I don't think is very considerate. This hon. member has often been quoted as saying that she represents her constituency with all of the views that she presents. If indeed laughing at a program such as this is representing the constituency, I have great doubts.

Seriously, this is a wonderful program. This is a great recognition for this province, and I feel that this indeed is making light of a very prestigious program.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a point of order was raised by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and the hon. member raised several points.

First of all, the one with respect to brevity. The time that the chair noted was used in the exchange of these three questions amounted to four minutes, which is less than the average for the other sets of questions in the House today. Brevity certainly was not an issue with respect to this matter.

2:50

Seriousness of a subject matter. The ultimate arrogance of course in a parliament is to deny an hon. member the right to ask his or her question. Who can suggest that a question that an hon. member would come and raise is unimportant? It is every member's right to raise the subject matter and the question of their choosing that they believe is important. So there is no humorous or funny question with respect to the matter.

The chair would also like to point out that sometimes people may think these things are taken lightly. The chair was one of the originators of this program in the mid-1970s when he served in another capacity. Unfortunately, the first or second year in which this program was done, there was a child killed. That was not a good day for the child, needless to say. It was not a good day for the family of the child. It was not a good day for the friends and the other people in the clubs, and it was most certainly not a good day for some of us who were responsible for the program and the implementation of it. So I simply say that what may be viewed as serious or not serious is very, very subjective.

Now with respect to comments that are made across the way, hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Perhaps sometimes some hon. people do respond to comments that they hear coming across the way. Today is an example. In the first set of questions, when an hon. member of Executive Council was responding to a question raised by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert provided nine interjections to the first answer, 20 interjections to the second answer, 12 interjections to the third answer, for a total of 41 interjections in a series of three questions. Now, these were questions raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

#### **Bill 205 School (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Act, 1999**

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Klapstein]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take a very few minutes to reiterate some of the merits of Bill 205, which proposes to legislate the current kindergarten program and ensure its availability provincewide. As I understand, for the current school year kindergarten is offered in all jurisdictions, and more than 97 percent of Alberta children are attending an ECS program. As kindergarten is already a successful program in Alberta, Bill 205

would simply reaffirm the importance of the program and ensure its continuing success in all parts of the province in years to come.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Currently Alberta Education allows for a school jurisdiction or an approved early childhood services operator to provide private, not-for-profit programming. This means that early childhood programs can be run by churches, by volunteer groups, and communities as long as they meet government standards for education. Mr. Speaker, this legislation does not propose anything which is not already being done in the province. Alberta Education has established a province-wide standard for early education and provides qualified ECS teachers.

The goal of Bill 205 is to ensure that all children have equal opportunity to benefit from kindergarten if the child's parent wishes. This stepping-stone to formal education would ultimately remain the choice of parents of kindergarten-age children. There is no question that parental choice and meeting the needs of the individual child is a priority of Education in Alberta. For this reason the flexibility of the current kindergarten program would be maintained in Bill 205. That would be to allow parents to mold the most appropriate learning experience for their child.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands, the early childhood services program is addressed in the regulations, but as legislation it would be consistent with most other provincial jurisdictions. Clearly, other provinces throughout the country have given serious consideration to the early years of schooling and taken measures to accomplish quality education. Also, falling in line with other legislation in provincial jurisdictions, Bill 205 proposes 400 hours of kindergarten as the minimum amount of hours to be provided in order to receive funding. This remains unaltered from our present policy. However, many kindergarten programs in Alberta exceed this minimum amount of hours. Some programs offer up to 420 or 440 hours as a regular program.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with the quality of kindergarten programming in our province. I believe we have a quality curriculum and a sound program, which reaches all corners of this diverse province. Albertans value early education and appreciate the flexibility and the choice of the program. Alberta's children are receiving a solid foundation upon which to begin a formal education, and they are developing the skills that will help them grow to become successful adults. Bill 205 simply reaffirms this by legislating what is current policy.

I truly believe in the merits and the timeliness of this legislation, and I encourage all members to lend their support to Bill 205.

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

**MRS. SLOAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege this afternoon to rise and debate Bill 205, the school amendment act, and I do so acknowledging for the record that I think there are some serious cases of political amnesia that have been undiagnosed in this Assembly.

We heard in the prior member's comments a discussion about the value of early childhood education, almost to disassociate without saying so this government's cuts to that very program in the last decade in this province. In fact, we saw kindergarten slashed to 200 hours per child under this government's watch. There were, subsequent to that, two Liberal Official Opposition bills introduced to mandate tuition-free -- emphasis noted -- 400-hour kindergarten provincially. Those were Mr. Henry's Bill 227 in 1994, Mr.

Mitchell's Bill 202 in 1995, and again a bill by Mr. Henry, Bill 211, in 1996.

Now, just to further educate the hon. members about the importance of kindergarten, I think I would like to review this afternoon just some of the fundamentals that children receive when they attend kindergarten in their early childhood.

Early literacy, the basics of reading. Children learn ABCs; they begin to read. They have introductory phonics, read words, and develop an interest in books, authors, literature, and libraries: all fundamental pillars, Mr. Speaker, of developing fluent reading skills for future life. Further, in kindergarten children learn to read numbers. They learn to count. They learn math basics, math foundations. They add and subtract and learn to recognize and read numbers.

Kindergarten also teaches children some of the fundamentals of verbal communication. Children are supported in becoming more talkative, interacting more readily, being more outgoing, verbalizing, communicating, having confidence in themselves when speaking to others. They also learn a very important skill, the skill of listening. Some members get all the way to government and still haven't mastered it, Mr. Speaker.

Vocabulary and speech improved, in some schools they in fact begin to learn a second language, or they may, in contrast, begin to learn English in an English as a Second Language setting. Children in kindergarten also learn how to write. They learn how to write the ABCs, numbers, their name, spelling, how to hold a pencil, how to print.

**3:00**

Kindergarten is also very much about teaching children how to adapt to the settings and the structures and the agendas in which they may find themselves in the future. They learn how to adapt to routine, to the school culture, to get up and get to school on time, about learning, being comfortable, expectations, rules, structure, recess, classrooms, and other transitions. They also learn how to function in groups, to work and play with others, to participate, become comfortable with others, have fun, become stimulated, involved, do co-operative play, how to work together, Mr. Speaker, learn together, and learn through play.

Some of the social skills that perhaps are not overly emphasized or well understood by the members of this Assembly or the general population, for that matter: the general social skill development surrounding awareness, maturity, interpersonal skills, coping, even just some of the basic self-esteem issues that children may struggle with as they're exposed to a broader environment for the first time. Children in kindergarten learn how to cultivate friendship, how to share, how to interact with other children. They learn how to make decisions and even the elementary steps of problem solving. All of these things -- creativity, art work, drawings and crafts -- this government under their watch tried to erode.

So it's with a degree of hypocrisy, I guess, today that after three opposition bills on this very issue we find ourselves debating a bill introduced by the same government that cut kindergarten in this province by 50 percent. That's the contradiction.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Private Members' Public Bills**

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Hon. member, the chair's job is not to enter into debate, but it is to preserve and protect the traditions and the rules of the House. This is a private member's public bill. It is not in any way a government bill. We must take note of that. So if you could remember that. You can talk about all the ills of the government in the context of the bill, but it is not a government bill.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, the voting patterns of the government appear to reflect a lack of respect and understanding for kindergarten in the beginning. So I take your point this afternoon. We'll see at the conclusion of this debate whether or not we've got commitment in this Assembly to kindergarten, Mr. Speaker, aside from the fact that it's a private member's bill.

### Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: To conclude my educational lecture on the importance of kindergarten. Families and businesses deserve the certainty of basic early childhood education. This isn't some election goody, Mr. Speaker, that should be extended or withdrawn at the whim of the cabinet. Kindergarten was not originally entrenched in the School Act because the government of the day thought the benefits and necessity of kindergarten to be so self-evident that to include it in the act was unnecessary.

Well, history has taught us that we should never take anything for granted. Unfortunately, they didn't anticipate that the current government would use kindergarten to balance its budget on the backs of five year olds. Clearly, today it's our responsibility to entrench the provision of early childhood in the School Act so that no future government can again treat Alberta families and children so arbitrarily, callously, and carelessly.

To further stress the importance of kindergarten, I'd offer these further points for members to ponder. Kindergarten serves as an intervention point that allows "for early identification and assistance for at-risk children." We have seen, Mr. Speaker, that there are thousands of children at risk, over 90,000 in this province alone that are at risk of hunger, not having their basic nutritional needs met on a daily basis, as reported by the city of Calgary Mayor Duerr's report and the Edmonton Social Planning Council report.

It's also important to note that "five year olds don't learn in the same way as older children. They need experiences and activities that are meaningful for children of their age." That finding was by Karwett in 1992.

It has been shown that

every dollar spent on Kindergarten funding saves seven dollars in future costs related to schooling, welfare, criminal justice, and lost taxes due to lower salaries. Consequently, cutting the deficit by slashing kindergarten spending makes very poor long term economic sense.

It's worthy, for the record, Mr. Speaker, to note that it hasn't been just cuts to kindergarten that this government has made. It's been cuts to social services, which have affected welfare families and children residing in those families. It has been cuts to early intervention programs; the elimination of the day care operating allowance, thereby creating a two-tiered day care system in this province, another fundamental entry point for the identification of at-risk children.

There is [further] evidence that children who fail to achieve minimal competence in social relationships with their peers during the early years are at risk of developing a variety of problems including academic failure, dropping out of school and later mental health difficulties.

That finding was reported by Katz in 1992.

We had some discussion this afternoon about this government's commitment to the world and to leaders with respect to the environment. Need I remind members of the Assembly that

the World Declaration on Education For All states that in designing policies to improve basic education, the preconditions for educational quality, equity and efficiency are set in the early childhood years.

So should we not be setting the bar to meet those principles at the

earliest possible level, at kindergarten or earlier, in the province of Alberta?

We also know that Alberta, while having

the highest gross domestic product per capita of any province, in 1992 . . . spent the least percentage of GDP on education.

Talk about shortsighted.

Alberta ECS is now being funded at \$595 per pupil per year. The next lowest funding level is Saskatchewan where children are funded at \$1,555 per pupil per year,

over double our amount.

Frequently quoted research provides convincing evidence that pre-school programs improve cognitive performance during early childhood; improve placement and achievement during school years; decrease delinquency and crime; decrease welfare assistance; reduce incidence of teenage pregnancy; increase high school graduation; and increase enrollment in post-secondary programs.

Is it necessary for me to say yet again in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that we have one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the country? We also have a dropping level of high school students graduating from secondary education. I think our current rate is about 68 percent. We have the Minister of Justice and the Premier talking about the increase in crime and how we address that. We hear the Minister of Justice talking about getting tough on crime and young offenders. If he was really interested in addressing the root causes of those issues, he'd be looking to early intervention programs, providing the full complement of kindergarten programs to children in this province regardless of where they reside, what their income level is, what their culture, their race, or creed is.

3:10

Children are not like roads. Road maintenance in this province can be deferred, and it has been in the last three years often with little additional future costs. They can wait and be repaired and still provide an excellent transportation route. But a child's education cannot be deferred. If it isn't provided when it's needed, fixing it in the future will be either impossible or far more expensive than doing it right in the first place.

I can see that the members are looking at the clock, looking for some relief from my debate this afternoon. I know I have just over two minutes. I have two minutes left, and I intend to use it to the max.

In recent presentations on the framework for funding school boards in the province of Alberta, one of the most frequently recurring themes was a deep concern that the proposed level of funding for kindergarten was inadequate, a very similar theme to the continued calls from parents, school counselors, teachers, members of the opposition, SOS petitions. Mr. Speaker, even this past weekend industry leader Eric Newell, perhaps a Premier-in-waiting -- who knows? -- told this government at their own policy convention that funding of education across all levels in this province is inadequate. Inadequate. Rallies have been held across the province on the issue. Thousands and thousands of people have signed petitions to urge this government to spend more. Clearly, there's a widespread recognition that spending money on this aspect of our children's future is money well spent and money that the taxpayers and citizens of this province support spending.

The world has changed a great deal since I was five years old. The issues that our children have to deal with now and when they grow up will be more complex and frequently more critical than the ones we faced. I want to ensure that my children, our children are equipped to deal with the future and that it is even more important than it was 20 years ago. Yet we seem to insist in this province that we must turn the clocks back to the early '70s and offer our children the second-worst kindergarten program in the country.

That is why I will be supporting this motion this afternoon. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate on Bill 205.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon and make some concluding remarks on Bill 205.

MR. HERARD: Then stand up.

MR. AMERY: I am standing up, Denis.

The debate, Mr. Speaker, has certainly brought forward some interesting issues pertaining to education in this province. I'd like to thank all members who offered their insight and experiences. I have taken the comments and advice into account.

Mr. Speaker, the objective of bringing this bill forth does not alter or change the present kindergarten situation in Alberta. It was to simply bring about awareness of the importance of early education and to ensure all children have access to a kindergarten program.

I think it's quite clear that the time is right to legislate 400 hours of kindergarten into the School Act. As mentioned previously in the debate, Alberta Education has established a concrete program over the last few years for kindergarten in Alberta. We have certified ECS teachers teaching kindergarten, we have an established kindergarten curriculum, and we have program guidelines which must be followed by both public and private ECS operators.

Mr. Speaker, to answer the question concerning alternative programming asked by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona earlier in this debate, I would like to clarify that this is not a new initiative. The nature of the present kindergarten program is flexible to meet the needs of children in all corners of this province. As an example, it is the responsibility of the school board to ensure that a kindergarten program as specified by Alberta Education is available, assuming that no other program is offered in the community. The present ECS system encourages private operators to continue to provide services, particularly in small rural areas where school boards may no longer have schools, thus ensuring that Albertans have access to a kindergarten program in some form. Bill 205 maintains this flexibility while proposing to solidify a more concrete kindergarten program by including it in the Alberta School Act.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, allow me to say that I am pleased to have been able to initiate debate on this issue in the House. I think that the bill has merit, and I want to reiterate and assure everyone that Bill 205 not only reflects the wishes of Albertans but is also a direct result of the recommendations made during the 1997 Alberta Growth Summit. So I would urge all members of this Assembly to support second reading of Bill 205.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in favour of second reading of Bill 205, School (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Act, 1999, as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:17 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

|           |           |          |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Amery     | Klapstein | Pham     |
| Bonner    | Leibovici | Shariff  |
| Calahasen | MacBeth   | Sloan    |
| Cao       | Massey    | Soetaert |
| Coutts    | Olsen     | White    |
| Dickson   | O'Neill   | Wickman  |
| Gibbons   |           |          |

Against the motion:

|          |           |            |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Broda    | Hlady     | Paszkowski |
| Burgener | Jacques   | Renner     |
| Cardinal | Johnson   | Severtson  |
| Day      | Jonson    | Smith      |
| Dunford  | Kryczka   | Stelmach   |
| Fischer  | Langevin  | Stevens    |
| Forsyth  | Lougheed  | Strang     |
| Graham   | McClellan | Tarchuk    |
| Haley    | McFarland | Thurber    |
| Hancock  | Nelson    | Trynchy    |
| Herard   | Pannu     | Yankowsky  |
| Hierath  |           |            |

|         |           |               |
|---------|-----------|---------------|
| Totals: | For -- 19 | Against -- 34 |
|---------|-----------|---------------|

[Motion lost]

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

3:30 **Health Care Accountability**

509. Mr. Marz moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish effective accountability measures within the health care system through mechanisms at the point of health service access involving both the consumer and provider.

[Debate adjourned April 20: Ms Leibovici speaking]

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to summarize the comments that I had begun on initially listening to and hearing what the motion was with regards to health care accountability. I've had the opportunity to look more closely at what the statements were and to look as well at what the medical savings accounts entail. My initial statement still stands, that what in fact these would do would be to ensure the initial steps of privatization of our health care system.

I cannot support this motion, given the explanation that was put forward by the member who put forward Motion 509. This motion in fact would limit choices with regards to access to health care, would be more costly to our health care system, especially when we talk about every invoice being signed by both the patient and the provider before it is paid by Alberta Health. It would lead to increased bureaucracy as well.

The information that every single Member of this Legislative Assembly has had, that is loud and clear from Albertans, is that what we must do is protect to the utmost our publicly funded, single-payer system. This, as it is explained, would not do that and would ensure that that system is under attack. So I will not be supporting this motion.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to rise and debate Motion 509. The motion that's been proposed, a private member's motion, is to

urge the government to establish effective accountability measures within the health care system through mechanisms at the point of health service access involving both the consumer and provider.

Again, the theme of the previous motion, with respect to early childhood education -- specifically, making kindergarten a legislated requirement in this province -- is, sadly enough, a similar theme in this motion this afternoon, and that is that we have a very strong, rapidly spreading, almost epidemic case of political amnesia in this government.

So in a similar sense, while the government chooses to not acknowledge the cuts they made to kindergarten, we also see this afternoon a refusal to acknowledge the cuts made to the health care system that have eroded the care in the system. It has eroded the qualifications of our professionals. It's eroded the number of professional and trained staff serving in the health care system. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it has shaken to the very foundations the public's trust in this government's ability to deal with, to lead, to have a plan for the delivery of public health care in this province.

So while I will not be supporting the motion this afternoon because I think it's a token motion, I applaud the private member on the government side who's brought this forward. What it is to me is a signal that there is at least one person in this government's caucus that does acknowledge the criticalness of our current health care system and what needs to be done to stabilize the provision of public health care and to ensure we do not go the private, for-profit route, which is really the easiest out, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be the out that this government would like to take.

I read with some interest I guess about a week ago Highlights of the Alberta Economy, that was produced by the Department of Alberta Economic Development. I was fascinated to go through and see how the department had provided, in both micro and macro analysis, the progress Alberta has made economically. Very interesting that the only social-based indicators for economic that they provided were -- well, in fact, they cited quality health care as a measure. While they go through in some of the other indicators, like Workers' Compensation Board premiums, and the department highlights that Alberta has the lowest level of premiums in the country, in health care we didn't provide those similar measures, Mr. Speaker.

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour is rising on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Clarification

MR. SMITH: Thank you. It will be a point of clarification, Mr. Speaker. Workplace compensation premiums are not legislated by

the government of Alberta, nor are they taxpayers' money. They're employers' dollars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, you have an opportunity to clarify it when the hon. member is finished.

Edmonton-Riverview.

#### Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listen; you can take this report. I'm offering it as an example. I think if you just look at the province economically, it's actually not a bad report. However, when you look at how we've identified on some of the other indicators more micromasures, in health care we don't do that. In fact, in this case the government is touting "quality health care" in the province. They say, "For modest insurance premiums, Albertans can take advantage of an exceptional range of medical services." What they don't say is that what that's basically hinging on is a person's ability to pay the extra money to get to the front of the queue in the private system as our public system's waiting lists are growing by the day.

The report says that "the costs of health care in Alberta, as they are in the rest of Canada, are for the most part covered by general federal and provincial taxes." Now, that is on the verge of misleading. We know that this year in the lottery estimates we saw huge allocations of lottery funding to health care for the purchase of medical equipment and other base programs. Here in this report we're saying that we provide for the most part our funding to health care from "federal and provincial taxes." Not true. You know, it's sort of peekaboo politics. That is what it is. It's a way of trying to market the province on the basis of a system but just not telling the whole truth.

The report says that "major medical centres in Edmonton and Calgary offer specialty and high technology care while pursuing active research programs." I thought: well, yeah, I guess that is at least partially true. It doesn't say that our emergency rooms in Edmonton and Calgary are generally jam-packed and that people are waiting 48 hours or more to get a bed in the system. It doesn't say that we've lost some of our best specialists in this province, from both a medical and a nursing capacity.

So when we talk about being accountable in the health care system, Mr. Speaker, being accountable starts with telling the truth. It starts, particularly, when we produce a marketing document that we are going to market around the world. It's about telling the full and complete, the whole truth about the status of health care in this province, not by introducing a motion in this Assembly to say that we should develop a token structure to measure accountability in the system.

3:40

I would ask the member that introduced this motion this afternoon: just how in fact will the accountability measures interrelate with the budgeting process of this government? How will that occur? Will it in fact be that when the Minister of Health consults the caucus of this government and says, "I'm setting about the task of defining a budget for health care," these accountability measures will actually play a part in that decision-making process? I can't say in my own mind, Mr. Speaker, that I would trust that they would, and given the high level of public concern out there about health care in this province, I think that the average citizen would not believe that these accountability measures would make a difference in the budgeting process. That's really what it comes down to.

Health care does cost money. It always has. In the early days in this country, in this province, those costs were borne by individuals

and their families. We progressed enough as a society that we believed and we enshrined that those should be costs that society as a whole should assume. It's been till this government that that has been respected, accepted, and supported unequivocally by Albertans. Only under this government's watch have we seen that fundamental trust eroded and the roots of a for-profit ideology take hold in health care in this province.

The other question I would ask is: would the accountability measures proposed by the private member apply to the private, for-profit system, that is creeping to adopt the provision of more and more services in this province? Are we again taking that blinder mentality, like the horse with the blinders on, and saying that we're going to make sure that the public health care system in this province is accountable but leaving the free-market health care, which this government seems to be promoting every waking moment, to define their own accountability measures? Then we'll have, Mr. Speaker, the unenviable position of having the private, for-profit system, which this government supports, and the public, not-for-profit system, which the majority of Albertans support, and different accountability measures for both. Won't that be a wonderful scenario to live under in this province? I can just hardly imagine.

Let's just for a moment speculate that in fact we were sincere about wanting to measure the effectiveness of our health care system. It doesn't mean that we look at the structural, the mechanical, the assembly-line types of indicators, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at the mortality rates of our infants in this province: one of the highest, if not the highest, in the country. Let's look at our performance with respect to low birth weight infants. Again, Alberta places near the top of the list within the incidence of low birth weight infants in 1997. In this province, of 37,000 children born in 1997, 6 percent were low birth weight, which resulted in 2,296 children starting their life already at a disadvantage.

Our mortality rates as well. In 1996, which was the last year for which rates were available, we had a death rate of infants of 231. Now, that was down. In 1995 our percentage was 6.9, which was 269 deaths, placing us the highest rate of infant mortality in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Those are the kinds of indicators if we want to look at health effectiveness. You don't just look at the bricks and mortar; you look at the population, the status of the most vulnerable in your society, and address the causes of their ill health.

Let's also look at the incidence of poverty and the appallingly low rates of welfare in this province, which the government has repeatedly refused to address. That's what I mean when I say: will these accountability measures be linked to the budgeting process? If you have the Minister of Health, who perhaps, let's just say for argument, has adopted the belief that we must make our system more accountable and that we must address some of the root causes of ill health, but you have a minister of social services who is still grasping that tightfisted mentality that says that we've got to put these responsibilities on the individuals, that we've got to address the welfare fraud in this province, and that we are not going to increase welfare rates -- if you've got those two realities, Mr. Speaker, the result is that you're not going to have an accountable system, and you are not going to address the roots of ill health in this province.

Let's look at the availability of adequate subsidized housing and the accessibility of our population to transportation in this province. Those are things which would not perhaps be obvious indicators of health, but in reality I see yet again, as in last year's report, that last year the most frequently reported issue the Public Health Appeal Board had to address was the inadequate housing or the unsanitary conditions of housing deemed unfit for human habitation. We know and the Minister of Municipal Affairs has in fact acknowledged that there's a critical shortage of subsidized housing in this province.

We've had in fact a summit about it. But we don't see this government moving anywhere to address those issues. They're looking to the private sector, looking to the developers, looking to the municipalities, looking to the real estate agents to address this issue.

The reality is that those individuals, those organizations do not have the macrolevers to be able to truly address the shortage of available subsidized housing in this province. That is why we have government. This government has chosen not to address that issue, so we have symptoms of that denial bubbling up and coming out in the work of the Public Health Appeal Board. If I had seen some indication that in fact this motion was going to touch on areas like subsidized housing, then perhaps it would have been a supportable motion. I don't believe and don't see that that is in fact the case.

The other area that I think we need to examine is the incidence of poverty and the number and percentage of disabled living in poverty or on the margins of poverty in this province. We are all, unfortunately, too familiar with what this government has proposed to the AISH program, the basic supports for people living with disabilities, in 1999 in Alberta. In essence, while they've tried to hoodwink the people of this province by saying that they're not going to make AISH a welfare program, we now see the legislation and we now see that that agenda is still very much alive and well. We'll be having the opportunity to debate that particular legislation in detail at some future point. But here again is the contradiction in the health of Albertans in this province and the contradiction with respect to this government's glossy promotion of health care. They didn't mention in the report I cited earlier, Highlights of the Alberta Economy, that they're planning to make our disability programs into welfare-based programs.

We have many children living in this province with disabilities, special needs, speech therapy needs, early intervention needs, and those are not being addressed.

I would be most happy at this time at the request of the Speaker to allow the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca a few moments to speak.

I regret that I cannot support this motion this afternoon for the reasons stated and several more that I didn't have the opportunity to provide, but I appreciate the chance to put those things on the record this afternoon.

Thank you.

3:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to close the debate by acknowledging that this government is considered a leader in the greater national community of Canada, a leading force that is not afraid to challenge conventional ways of thinking and doing things. Therefore, we should embrace the opportunity to examine alternatives that could, upon closer inspection, provide new and better ways to honour our commitment to Albertans that we continue to provide necessary health care services at a reasonable cost to the public. We must continue to harness and support the immense energy, initiatives, and creativity that exist to provide insightful and useful ideas for improving health care delivery systems.

Mr. Speaker, members of the public and members of this government have already shown commitment to better methods of health care delivery during the consultative process of the health care summit. It is our duty as elected representatives of Albertans that we openly examine better spending practices and ensure that there is consumer accountability.



Mr. Speaker, Albertans at this time are no doubt in a good position to look at innovative ways of improving our health care system and ensure that there is accountability by the consumer. I believe Albertans would be wise to look at piloting at least some projects to look at how we can reduce the health care usage as it presently stands not only in Alberta but across Canada, because you will find -- you can talk to any doctor or a pharmacist -- that presently up to 60 percent of the individuals walking through the doctor's door do not need the system at this time. If we continue to reduce the structure and not make changes at the point of entry, then we will no doubt continue to have difficulties with lineups at emergency and other health care facilities.

The current health care premiums that are in place -- for an example, in Alberta we presently collect approximately \$600 million worth of premiums. Mr. Speaker, a family pays approximately \$816; a single pays \$408. What you could do to reduce the usage is put in a process where families pay a deductible, say \$20 per visit, towards the premiums. If you listen to the doctors, they indicate that if you introduce paying a premium at the doctor's door, the potential is there to reduce doctor visitations by 50 percent.

What would happen if you did that is that the doctors could see half as many patients. As far as expenditures, the taxpayers would save millions of dollars. We could also at the same time encourage better use of our health care system. If you paid, for an example, \$20 per visit, Mr. Speaker, that would still allow you up to 40 visits to a doctor each year for a family. For the high users, you could have an appeal system to ensure that they can continue to have access to the medical system. For seniors who are presently high users, you could have a similar system.

What you could do with the seniors is increase the threshold level; for example, a single senior at \$27,000 and a couple at, say, \$50,000 before they started paying health care premiums. What you could do is advance the seniors their portion of the premiums, and from those dollars they could pay, say, \$10 a visit at the doctor's office. If the dollars were not used, then what you could do is use those same dollars for preventative health. That system no doubt could again reduce the number of visitations.

For welfare clientele, which sometimes are high users, Mr. Speaker, you could do a process similar to seniors, where you would advance monthly their health care premiums and indicate on there that dollars from those premiums advanced could be used towards health care visitations. Again, Mr. Speaker, for those people you would have to have an appeal system, and also it would only be available to long-term clientele use.

Mr. Speaker, this idea has been discussed with doctors, it has been discussed with pharmacists, and it's been discussed with patients or clientele or consumers. By all indications, if you introduced a system where you paid a deductible towards your premiums, you could usually drop the visitations by 50 percent.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I regret having to interrupt the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion carried]

### Social Policy

510. Mr. Shariff moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider establishing a council of ministers for social

issues to co-ordinate social policy development and delivery and to consult openly with Albertans about our changing social needs.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The social policies upon which our society is built require careful planning, application, and maintenance. As we all know, the entire process requires the anticipation of not only future needs but the ability to adapt to changing needs.

I have brought forth this motion because as both an MLA in this Assembly and a citizen of this province I am witnessing a growth in our population that is accompanied by diverse and changing social needs. I can see that over the next several years much of the focus of our society will be on social issues and thus a renewal of our values and beliefs. I believe that as a government we are well aware of this issue and are taking numerous measures to equip this province with the programs and initiatives to take us comfortably into the next millennium.

This motion is my contribution to this process. It is my suggestion on how to add to the progress and success of this government in meeting the needs of the people of this province, striking the right balance between our fiscal and social needs. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, this motion proposes to establish a co-ordinating unit that would serve to facilitate communication and co-ordination of the different programs and initiatives already in place and provide a means by which to monitor and evaluate both policies and activities. It would also provide a system to address potential conflicts in program delivery and to measure satisfaction of services.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken briefly about the values and beliefs of a society. These values and beliefs are directly related to how people should treat one another. Combined, these values and beliefs become a society's social policy. Now, when I refer to social policy, I'm including in that definition literacy programs, early childhood services, income assistance, social housing, legal aid, postsecondary education, career planning, et cetera, et cetera. We know that these areas fall under the jurisdiction of one or more departments and affect all people's lives in one way or another.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that we have put in place many positive initiatives to meet the needs of the people of Alberta. I also believe that these programs are working and achieving their respective mandates. I would point out that this motion is not suggesting there are problems with existing programs and initiatives. In fact, it is about adding to the system. I am encouraging the creation of a council that can take the initiative to examine how various programs affect the different departments, anticipate what needs are met by the program, and address any problems or conflicts that may arise during implementation.

Essentially, I envision this council to be an organization capable of looking at a program and having the foresight to recognize what effects there may be on other departments and to determine whether or not service delivery is adequate for all Albertans involved. This council would also provide for consistency in services, ensuring that all social policy activities are co-ordinated and consistent across all government departments. Together the ministers of this council would have the responsibility of collaborating, co-ordinating, monitoring, and evaluating social policy development throughout the province. They would also have the responsibility of consulting

openly with Albertans about our changing social needs.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw on the Council of Economic Development Ministers as an example. This council was created to ensure that the government's overall economic development activities are co-ordinated and consistent across all government departments. The council is also to take into account private-sector direction and input from the Alberta Economic Development Authority as well as to collaborate and consult with authorities in policy formation. Generally this council has provided a vehicle for the various ministers to develop improved communications and collaboration among ministers and ministries on cross-government economic issues such as taxation, climate change, and international marketing strategy.

Mr. Speaker, these are the types of activities I foresee a council of ministers for social development would do in the area of social issues. I realize there are a number of issues that must be addressed, such as identifying the exact role of the council, the ministers that will participate, and the best process to achieve the mandate of the council while keeping the link between different levels of government and processes already under way.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, it is not my intent to come forth with a specific makeup of what the council would look like. I believe that at this stage it is important to examine the possibility of such a council and from there answer all the questions I have just discussed. My primary concern right now is that we look at setting up such a council. I don't believe there is any argument about the importance of a social policy for this province or any other for that matter.

I think we would all agree that social policy is about people development, about the people of Alberta being provided with the best possible standard of living. We do, Mr. Speaker, have numerous accomplishments which Albertans can be proud of. Albertans form the most productive workforce in Canada as well as one of the most skilled and educated in North America. This province has led all provinces in employment growth and had the lowest unemployment rate in 1998. Directly in the area of social policy this government has under the Alberta children's initiative helped create working partnerships at community, regional, and provincial levels. This initiative has laid out before us ways for communities and government to work together. This plan has shown positive thinking and has involved the ministries of Family and Social Services, Health, Education, Justice, Community Development, and the minister responsible for children's services.

Our population is growing as a result of migration from other regions of Canada or through immigration, and we welcome this growth. But along with the increase in the number of people comes the increase in demand for services. While we recognize that each new person will bring energy and skills to the Alberta advantage, we must be prepared to accommodate the challenges that will present before us. Mr. Speaker, we have to accept the reality that these new people, regardless of age or ethnicity, are going to bring greater demand on our hospitals, classrooms, roads, and other community services. This is a challenge we must meet with success.

Our health and the education of our children are priorities, and, in the bigger picture, people development is a priority for this government. We are investing over a billion dollars a year in people development. Mr. Speaker, all of the initiatives under way have the best interests of children, youth, and families of this province at heart. The establishment of the child and family services authorities, the action we are taking in addressing child prostitution, the initiatives to combat fetal alcohol syndrome, children's mental health needs, and children's health needs in school are only a few examples.

Mr. Speaker, we must also continue to recognize the fact that we

are facing a new millennium that will present us with all kinds of new challenges. As I have mentioned, this council could assist in anticipating outcomes of programs and determining the necessity of such initiatives as well as the effect each of these will have on various other departments and aspects of our society. With this type of a council we would have one unit that could be drawn together to discuss new ideas, possible implications of those ideas, and solutions for glitches that may occur along the path to implementation and maintenance of a program.

Mr. Speaker, it is not my intent to lay judgment or to question initiatives taken by this government. I'm here simply to suggest that this council may be a positive step to add to the system that is already in motion. I encourage the members of this Assembly to take a moment to reflect on the positive effects this council would have on the delivery of services to Albertans and the ability it would afford us as legislators of this province to meet the ever changing social needs of Albertans. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this motion.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to debate Motion 510, and I'd like to begin by acknowledging the sincerity of the private member who's proposed this motion. I do believe that he's proposed the motion this afternoon with a sincere concern about the development and progress of social policy in this province. So let the record show that in principle I'm supportive of the member's intent.

The dilemma, I guess, that exists, Mr. Speaker, is that we have more of a pet project syndrome that exists for the majority. When it comes to the adoption or the addressment of social issues, we see that the bigger trend in this government caucus is for members to adopt a pet social project which they will take around the province, and we've seen it with a variety of different issues. The reality is that that kind of approach doesn't address the macro social issues, the critical social issues and systemic issues that exist. While I would like to believe that at some deep depth the sincerity of the member proposing the motion exists in the government's cabinet, the proof just isn't in the pudding.

4:10

We just debated a motion about putting accountability measures into the health care system, and I talked about the issues of poverty, the issues of hungry children, the issues of the critical shortage of subsidized housing, the issues surrounding the appallingly low rates of welfare in this province. The reality is that the government doesn't want to address those issues. They want to disjoint them from the budgeting process. They want to disjoint them from the priority-setting process. They want to disjoint them from the political process in this province.

I'm afraid the reality this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is that the private member's motion -- albeit the government might run around the province and peddle it to the constituents and citizenry -- will not be adopted in the intent.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie rising on a point of order.

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

MRS. BURGNER: *Beauchesne* 459(1), relevance. Mr. Speaker,

my understanding is that the private member's motion that's before us has identified a specific concern of this member and is an issue that belongs not as a government motion but as one that's discussed in general. I'm having difficulty understanding why the arguments are now being directed specifically to attacking government policy and not focusing on what the member, even on her own merit, said was worthy of attention.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MRS. SLOAN: I'm most certainly dealing with the context in which the bill is being proposed, Mr. Speaker. The private member proposing the motion this afternoon is indeed a member of the government caucus unless I'm mistaken. He's certainly . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: This isn't a bill.

MRS. SLOAN: The motion.

. . . a member of the government caucus unless I'm mistaken, but in that respect I'll continue with my debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, excuse me. I have to rule on the point of order. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a point. This is in fact a section of the process that deals with private members' motions. I think it's probably appropriate to deal with the motion at hand and not go too far afield on all of these other issues that may surround perhaps different motions that might come up or may have come up before. So I would certainly ask the hon. member to concentrate on the issue of the motion.

Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, listen; I was trying to be nice. If you don't want me to be nice, I'll be brutal. I'll debate this on the merits then. That's the reality. Thank you so much for raising that point.

#### Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: So who exactly would this council of social ministers be? Who in fact would it be, Mr. Speaker? What would the representation on the council be? The hon. member that provided the motion this afternoon didn't go into those specifics. How would this council interrelate with the Provincial Treasurer, with the respective ministers, with the joint children's initiative and the budgeting process? How in fact would that occur?

When we have the predictable scrambling and prioritization for where funding is going to go in this province in the budgeting process, how in fact would this council make any difference to addressing the root social issues: the unavailability of subsidized housing, the growing number of children not receiving basic nutritional requirements, high teen suicide rate, high infant mortality, low birth weight babies, high rates of teenage pregnancies? How in fact would establishing yet another council that would most likely convene yet another summit make a difference, Mr. Speaker? That's the question.

How in fact could we as the opposition or as citizens take this formally as a sincere initiative, even though the member is proposing the motion, when the reality is that this government still remains solidly entrenched in having the Children's Advocate in this province under its thumb, holding up the release of its annual report, reducing its budget, restricting the ability of that office to assess the programs for children?

MR. DUNFORD: Misleading. Misleading.

MRS. SLOAN: The hon. minister of advanced education says that I'm misleading. Well, if he'd like to correct me, then let him stand up in this Assembly and tell citizens why last year's annual report . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, through the chair, please. Let's not have this debate across the two sword lengths.

MRS. SLOAN: I'm keeping my eyes focused just on you, Mr. Speaker, as difficult as that is at times. But the reality is that the Children's Advocate office is choke chained by the Minister of Family and Social Services, who dictates his budget, won't release his annual report.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Is the Government House Leader rising on a point of order?

#### Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Yeah. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), Mr. Speaker. The question with respect to the report from the Children's Advocate was clearly raised in the House the other day and answered by the Minister of Family and Social Services. I know the member there probably wasn't listening at the time, but the clear answer that I heard was that the report had not yet been prepared. So to make an allegation that it's being held up or held back or any of those things is absolutely inappropriate when the clear rules of the House say that one must accept the word of a member in the House. She asked the question, and it was answered.

I might refer to page 1234 -- how appropriate -- of the *Alberta Hansard* on Monday afternoon, April 26, 1999. I can't find exactly where it is here, but the answer was clearly given that the Children's Advocate report had not been finalized when that question was asked.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) I believe is the citation that the hon. House leader is using. I am most certainly not making allegations against a member. Imputing "false or unavowed motives to another member": I do not believe that my comments could be reflected or interpreted in that section. My language is not abusive, and it's not likely to cause disorder. So I don't believe there's a point of order. I think, in fact, what the hon. House leader is attempting to do is to interrupt the process of debate and waste the time of this Assembly this afternoon when we're debating a sincere motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, with respect to the point of order, I was listening very carefully to the debate, as I always do, and I think that if a member stands up and says, "This government is doing XYZ," it's one thing. It's another thing to say that the minister of social services or any other minister or any other member, for that matter, does this or that and impute motives or make allegations against a particular person. So I would suggest, hon. members, that we get back on the debate.

4:20

#### Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If in fact we were sincere in this province about truly addressing social issues and the government which the sponsoring member is a member of was sincere about addressing social issues, perhaps they could start in this

province by making the office of the Children's Advocate independent of government. Other provinces have gone that route. They give it an independent capacity, an independent budget. There's no partisan interference in any respect. But we don't see that reality. In fact, I've been told by the current Children's Advocate that there is not system advocacy offered by his office any longer, and he does not produce, in that respect, system reports about the adequacy of programs for children in this province. So that's the reality on this hand.

On this hand this afternoon I'm being asked to accept a motion to establish a council of ministers, and I would say: why would any rational, intelligent individual take a token motion when the reality is that the office that has a budget and is legislated to respect the issues and rights of children in the child welfare system in this province is not afforded the ability to do that? Why would I do that?

Further, let's just talk a little bit about the philosophy and the performance of the Department of Family and Social Services in the context of this motion. We see in the department's annual report nine performance measures used that are primarily based on evaluating the reported activity of the system, not on evaluating the status, progress, or well-being of our most vulnerable citizens. Four measures, in fact, show an improved performance when more families and individuals are being denied access to required services. The measures are a decrease in expected-to-work clients, a decrease in employment initiative graduates receiving benefits . . .

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

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt, but I read the motion again, and I don't understand where you're going with this. What you're speaking to may be quite relevant to some other subject, but I don't think it's relevant to this particular motion. So could you speak to the motion please.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, what good does a council of ministers for social issues do when the philosophy of the current Department of Family and Social Services is to rationalize and deny benefits? How is that? It's most certainly on the point of the motion. What I'm trying to point out is that it's a token concept to establish a structure and council to address social issues when the very department that could be taking a leadership role in addressing those issues that are of most importance, critical importance, to vulnerable Albertans is negligent. That's the point.

#### **Debate Continued**

MRS. SLOAN: The other reality that we see within the annual report is a continual denial to reflect the number of children in this province that are abused, that are neglected, or that die while in the care of government. That is a reality. The minister and the government have been told on many, many occasions, and they refuse at the bare minimum to report how many children were abused, neglected, or died while in the care of government or while known to government. So again I would say: let's bring it right down to the individual level. What difference is it going to make to a child who's abused or neglected while in the care of this government to have a council of ministers for social issues when this government won't even reflect the fact that they were abused, neglected, or that they died in the course of a fiscal year? What difference will it make? None.

The other reality is that we have a process engaged to regionalize and privatize child welfare or services for children in this province. That is again another initiative that's completely separate and apart

from the motion that's before us this afternoon. Let's for the sake of argument say that the child authorities go the same road as the health authorities have gone. They are nothing more than a mechanism for this government to offload their deficit on. They're fraught with problems in terms of accessibility and declining quality and accountability. We have the government currently appointing 18 regional boards in the province to deliver child welfare and children's services. How, in fact, would a council of ministers on social issues relate with the children's regional authorities? What relationship would that council have to the joint children's initiative that was announced last year by this government? We have six ministers that signed the children's initiative: the ministers of Community Development, Education, Family and Social Services, Health, Justice, and the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services.

In that document the government sets out a plan to support the healthy development of children, to integrate service delivery, to provide a framework through which there would be direction and policy in provincial standards, the allocation of resources, ensuring the delivery of quality services, and evaluating and reporting performances. So how would a council of ministers on social issues work, relate, perhaps compete with the ministers assigned to the joint children's initiative? I think it would be nothing more than a complex, fragmented structure which would just set up this government to be more divisive in their priority setting and more divisive in terms of their budget allocations than they currently are. That's the other reality, Mr. Speaker.

We have had a number of other issues, and these have all been raised with the government on numerous occasions. So if there had been steps taken to address or adopt them, I would generally be more trusting of the intent of this motion this afternoon, but regrettably that's not the case.

Last fall prior to the announcement of the children's initiative the Official Opposition in fact released a report titled Vulnerable Children. What that report intended to do and in fact accomplished, Mr. Speaker, was to track the vulnerability of children in Alberta and attempt to define how many children were living with those vulnerabilities. We made three recommendations to the government at that time, none of which, regrettably, the government has chosen to adopt.

One was to make the Children's Advocate office independent, which I've spoken about already. The second was to develop a provincial report card on children, to compile a factual and an objective analysis of indicators like child abuse; the incidence of missing children; child welfare caseloads; abuse, neglect, and deaths of children in care, well known to government; the number of families living on social assistance; and the proportion of children in lone-parent families living on assistance. Further, in the compilation of this information regional authorities would assist the government in compiling data on child apprehensions, academic achievement, percentage of students graduating from grade 12, long-term school absenteeism, child hunger, substance abuse, suicides, teenage births, and low birth weight infants. No action taken in that respect. We are going to have a children's forum though, and dare I risk starting on that topic this afternoon?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt again, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

Hon. members, prior to recognizing the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, may we revert briefly to the introduction of visitors?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

head: Introduction of Guests

4:30 (reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly five representatives of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta. Seated in the public gallery are Bob Young, FCA, vice-president and president-elect; Steve Glover, FCA, executive director; Wayne Kauffman, CA, associate executive director; Al Budlong, CA, director of practice review; and Marie Iwanow, the manager of communications. They are here to observe the debate on second reading of Bill 34, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

**Bill 34  
Partnership Amendment Act, 1999**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 34, being the Partnership Amendment Act, 1999.

The principle of Bill 34 is to allow certain professions -- accountants, lawyers, physicians, dentists, optometrists, and chiropractors -- the option of carrying out their practice under a limited liability partnership. Bill 34 will achieve this by amending the existing Partnership Act and by amending the related professional statutes. The Partnership Act is under the administration of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and the professional statutes are administered by the appropriate ministries of Labour, Justice, and Health.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, many of the subject professions have seen major changes to the types of entities under which they practice. They have evolved from individuals practising alone to small partnerships operating from one location, to medium-size partnerships in multilocations throughout Alberta, and to large national and international partnerships in locations throughout Alberta, Canada, and the world. But today a partner in Alberta is at risk of losing all of his or her personal assets as a result of the actions of a partner in another location in Alberta, in Canada, or indeed throughout another country and over which that partner has no control or influence. While this situation is of particular concern to accountants and lawyers, it could also impact physicians, dentists, chiropractors, and optometrists in the future. The issue for the six professions is that of equity. Other professions can limit their personal liability by using the existing corporate statutes. Members of these six professions do not have that option.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to outline the proposed amendments. Firstly, a limited liability partnership, otherwise known as an LLP, will offer a partner protection from personal liability arising from settlements or claims due to negligence, malpractice, incompetence, wrongful acts, or misconduct when the partner was not directly involved in the conduct, had no direct supervision or control over the

conduct, or had no notice of knowledge of the conduct at the time it occurred. Secondly, approval from the governing body of the profession must be received before an LLP can be created. Thirdly, the LLP would have to be registered in the corporate registry by filing the necessary documents to identify the partnership, its members, and related information. Fourth, the registration of an LLP formed outside of Alberta will be required to meet the same standard as an Alberta LLP. Lastly, consequential amendments to professional statutes are necessary. Provisions to the professional statutes will be added that govern the powers and the duties of LLPs.

Mr. Speaker, as we enter debate on Bill 34, it is important to note that this legislation is enabling legislation. In no way does this legislation prescribe that an LLP is mandatory. Indeed, if the governing body does not want an LLP to occur, it will not occur. Conversely, if the governing body of the profession does endorse the concept of an LLP, then the LLP must meet the terms and conditions of the governing body as well as the terms and conditions of the Partnership Act. It is equally important to note that the legislation in no way diminishes the high standards of professional qualifications, professional standards, or professional conduct as established and monitored by the appropriate governing body.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish to advise members that the principles of limited liability partnerships have the support of the Law Society of Alberta, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Certified General Accountants' Association, and the Certified Management Accountants Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the debate.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, lest it be said that the opposition rarely supports government initiatives that show promise -- and this is something more important than what was it that the Premier said? The beehive act? I'm happy to stand and indicate that this is, I think, an excellent piece of legislation.

For a very long time we've been in a situation where certain professionals were able to create professional corporations. We've had a situation where I know certainly many lawyers practise in loose forms of partnership arrangements, where the exposure to lawsuits and damage claims, simply by virtue of the partnership relationship, worked a very unfair result.

I think the notion of having a limited liability partnership is progressive. I think it's contemporary. I think it reflects the dynamics of what is going on in this most dynamic of provinces. I think it allows people to order their business affairs, in terms of carrying on their professional practices, in a way that does not unduly expose them to lawsuits, damage claims, and, maybe more significantly, large insurance premiums.

So I think there's a lot of value in this bill, and I'm happy to support it. I think this is more important than the beehive act or whatever the Premier likes to make reference to. This is one of those bills that I'd like to think all members in the Assembly would see the merit in and the value of.

In principle, there is little to say by way of need for change. There are some elements, though, that I think can be improved, and I refer to some of the detail in the bill. I'd hate for our friend from Grande Prairie-Wapiti to think there'd be no good advice that we'd be able to offer at some stage of the proceedings. I know that member would eagerly embrace good advice and be prepared to look for ways to make the bill better and stronger.

Well, I have no problem with the notion of a registered limited liability partnership, and also it makes sense to make the provision for those that wish to extraprovincially register if it's a limited liability partnership in another jurisdiction, just as we do with regular business corporations now. There are a lot of corporations

registered, for example in Ontario or in another jurisdiction, that want to extraprovincially register here. It's appropriate that that should also be available to limited liability partnerships.

The area of concern and I think the place where we could make some improvement would be at section 10 on page 14 of the bill. There's a general regulation provision, and then what we go into is a series of derivative sections that deal with regulations under each of the professional statutes. I think there is a public interest involved here. It is not simply a question of what's in the best interests of members of those professions. Their point of view is valid and important. I expect the Institute of Chartered Accountants would be the first organization to acknowledge that there's also a significant public interest. That's part of the burden of self-regulation, of self-government.

I think when we deal with regulations that affect what this model is going to look like, we can see that very significant power is provided for subordinate lawmaking, that substantial and extensive power is set out in section 10 -- this would be the new proposed section 92 -- and then sections 11(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8). I think the Institute of Chartered Accountants; the benchers of the Law Society; the governing council of the Medical Profession Act, the College of Physicians and Surgeons; and the governing bodies of the other professional groups would recognize that there would be value in ensuring that regulations rather than being made as has historically been the case, by secret order in council, something that's done in a pretty invisible way to the public, by some form of communication or conferencing between the representatives of the profession, on one hand, and the appropriate cabinet minister on the other -- then what we have as a result is a number of regulations, and we don't see them until they're proclaimed. Would it not make sense to do what happens with the Alberta Securities Commission?

We were reminded of this just the other day by the Member for Edmonton-Mountain View when he reminded us that regulations under the Alberta . . .

4:40

MRS. SOETAERT: Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. DICKSON: Calgary-Mountain View. Once we lost the General hospital, I lost my bearings, Mr. Speaker.

The point I was attempting to make: would it not make sense to do what the Alberta Securities Commission does? That is, prepare the regulations in draft form, make them publicly available so that whether it's a chartered accountant or a physician or a lawyer or one of those other professional groups, they would have a chance to offer some comment on the draft regulation. It would also allow interested members of the public -- and I don't expect there are going to be thousands, nay even hundreds, but there will be some members of the public who have an interest in what is going to be in these regulations. What possible prejudice would there be, yet what powerful advantage there would be, in terms of simply saying: let's publish these regulations in draft form, or let's refer them to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, simply to be able to review them before they have the force of law.

Not a very radical suggestion. We have a standing committee of this Legislature. We have a number of people tasked to sit on that committee. What would be the possible prejudice, Mr. Speaker, in simply saying that these regulations should be vetted by this standing committee? Certainly in my dealings with the Institute of Chartered Accountants, with the Law Society, with those other professional organizations, they've shown to me that they have been leaders in terms of responding to the public interest, that they've

been leaders in terms of including public representatives on their governing bodies. They've shown that kind of sensitivity that I think is appropriate and important to that broader public interest. So to be consistent with those things, why would we not say that for the regulation provision we simply make sure that there is some prior vetting of regulations before they have the force of law?

If there's some compelling reason why that's not possible, why it doesn't work, I challenge the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to share that with us. I'm interested in hearing the arguments. If there are other members who have some reason why these regulations would have to be hatched in secret before they become law and why they couldn't be done in a more transparent sort of way, I'm inviting that sort of commentary and that kind of advice.

I make the point that if this is the way the Alberta Securities Commission operates under the Securities Act, if it's the way the regulations are enacted by the House of Commons, where they're published in draft form before they become law, it can scarcely be argued that it doesn't work or that it somehow impedes the workings of these professional organizations.

So if the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti were interested in securing speedy passage of this bill and unanimous consent, there is no better way to do that, not just now when we're debating the principle but as we deal with the minutiae of the bill and the detail of the bill, than to simply stand up and say: I'm prepared to commit on behalf of the government that these regulations under the proposed new section 92 will be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. As a member of that committee I can't speak for the committee. I'm looking for the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, who chairs that committee. She's the one who will have to speak for the committee. But for myself I'd be happy to look at the amendments and treat them with speedy dispatch, and if they appear to be in the public interest, then I'd be happy to see them adopted, just as I support the rest of the bill because I think it also is constructive, positive, and not contrary to the public interest.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I hear a lot of chirping from government members from their seats. What surprises me is that I thought here was a bill there would be widespread support for, and I'm disappointed if in fact there's as much concern as seems evident with a bill that I thought was pretty positive. When it comes to the vote, we're going to have to see what kinds of concerns those members may have with the notion of limited liability partnership.

There are some specific questions I had also.

MR. McFARLAND: Make it up if you can't think of anything.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm getting lots of good advice from southern Alberta here.

I think what I wanted to ask was what is estimated to be -- and I didn't hear this from the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti when he made his proposal, and I'm not sure if the hon. Member for Little Bow knows. He seems to be pretty conversant with the act. Maybe he's got the answer. I'm interested in what was expected to be the registration cost.

You know, I'm anxious that the notion of a limited liability partnership should be accessible to members of these professions. In light of the Supreme Court of Canada decision, the Eurig decision, and what we've determined to be a whole series of illegal taxes it appears the province of Alberta has been charging in this province by way of regulation when in fact they were taxes without legislative sanction, I'm in mind of the importance that the registration costs be reasonable. Perhaps the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti could tell us what sorts of costs we might anticipate in terms of registration. The question, once again in light of the

Eurig case and the Supreme Court of Canada decision, is: is it simply going to be a cost recovery basis?

When we looked at the bill the Provincial Treasurer introduced the other day and it had that huge list of fees which this province has been charging, so many of them are clearly taxes. There was a host of them that were taxes. I guess it would seem to me to be foolish in the extreme that the province, which is currently under challenge by the Supreme Court of Canada because of a bunch of illegal taxes, would then go and create yet another illegal tax. To avoid that, all they'd have to do would be to give a commitment that the registration fees that are going to be imposed under this statute are simply going to be on a cost recovery basis. That's a pretty simple proposition.

4:50

Fortunately, I'd just digress to say, thank heaven for the Supreme Court of Canada, because they have done more for the taxpayers and ratepayers of this province in the Eurig decision than we've seen Legislatures and Parliament do right across this country for decades.

You know, when I hear all the chatter from the government side, it makes me a little nervous. It makes me wonder whether they haven't understood what the Eurig case said, and it makes me suspicious that in fact they still want to generate illegal tax revenue by slipping in registration costs that exceed the cost of the service. So when I hear the increased comment around . . .

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

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Provincial Treasurer on a point of order.

**Point of Order  
Insulting Language**

MR. DAY: On Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). The member should know better than to talk about slipping in illegal taxes or illegal fees. The whole purpose of this exercise which we're doing in this province, unlike any other province, is to review all our fees. The court has not ordered us, has not told us we have to do that. We're doing a full review. I think it is poor parliamentary procedure and unbecoming of the member to stand up and talk about attempting to slip in illegal new fees. I'd like him to retract that, please.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: If the Provincial Treasurer were a little more familiar with 23(h), (i), and (j), he'd know that it refers to a member being impugned or being attacked in some way. If I didn't make it clear, I was referring to the government, and that includes the whole front bench. I had no intention of referring to a single minister.

Surely in the course of debate I'm entitled to talk in terms of what I think the government is or is not doing. He's entitled to his 20 minutes, and if he'd like to try and defend the illegal taxes that the government of Alberta has collected from Albertans, then I'm happy to debate that too.

But it's clearly no point of order, because I impugned the integrity of not a single member in this Assembly. The Provincial Treasurer may be a little thin-skinned, but that's his problem, Mr. Speaker. He can't use you or he can't use the Standing Orders to try and bolster his own acute sensitivity to criticism.

So those are my comments on the point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The point of order was raised on

Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Looking at (j) in particular, it makes reference to if a member "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I believe the language that was used by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo may have contributed to the debate. I believe that when the government implements any policies, they are done under the mandate of this Legislature. I believe that there is a point of order, and I hope you can continue with the debate and stick to the point before us.

Thank you.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm hopeful that all members are going to have a chance to read what the Supreme Court of Canada, which is the highest authority in this nation, has said about illegal taxation. I'm looking forward to seeing what sort of advice I get on this bill about what the government intentions are in terms of the kinds of fees they're going to charge.

I don't want to belabour the point; I've said I support the bill. I've offered some advice in terms of ways I think the bill can be strengthened to advantage the public interest, and I think I've also raised the concern I had with the registration costs. I'm looking forward to the further debate. I'm hopeful the Provincial Treasurer will share with us his good advice in the course of the debate, and I'm looking forward to those members that seemed to disagree with some of my comments standing in their places here this afternoon in the remaining 40 minutes and explaining just exactly what their concerns were. I'll be looking forward to what the Member for Little Bow and any other members have to share on the merits of the bill.

So with that, I'll let others stand and debate. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 34, the Partnership Amendment Act.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

**Bill 28**

**Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 1999**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Bill 28 serves the purpose of clarifying and simplifying the administration of corporate income taxes. It's being done in conjunction with some federal legislation for the purposes of harmonization of the capital tax base that financial institutions have been assuming. There's been an assignment or a new definition of what constitutes capital tax. Some financial institutions, in fact maybe most of them, in some of their accumulation of capital for the purposes of conducting their own operations have moved over the years to some very long-term debt provisions whereby they can acquire debt on the long term at relatively low rates. Then they

bring that back into their capital base and, in doing that, wind up not actually being subject to tax on that point of view.

So the federal government has initiated certain provisions to clarify that that, too, should fall under the definition of taxable, paid-up capital. In doing that, however, in terms of doing something to capture that broader base, there's also been the concern about not wanting to raise the tax burden on the institutions themselves. So the rate has dropped, though the base itself has expanded.

What this act will do in Alberta is simplify the administration of that and harmonize it with the federal legislation. The approach we're taking to that to offset that larger base is that the rate has been lowered to .7 percent -- that's for institutions -- on the first \$400 million of capital, and the remainder will be taxed at 1 percent. It's interesting, too, that by making this move to the lower rate on the first \$400 million of the capital, that will deal with some previous special relief we've had to have in place for Alberta-based financial institutions. They'll no longer require that. In communications we've had with them, they see this as a positive and productive move.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would also suggest and advise that the capital tax will be applied fully to the Treasury Branches and the credit unions following discussions with them to see how this can most appropriately be applied. That will continue to answer our approach of a level playing field for all financial institutions in the province.

I move this for second reading.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In rising to speak to Bill 28, once again this is a bill that looks, for the most part, like it warrants support. My inclination would be to support Bill 28, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, but I think I can see a need for some amendment. Perhaps I could highlight some of the amendments that I think would be required to Bill 28. [interjection] I'm happy to, Little Bow. I'm happy to tell you what I think ought to be changed.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members who feel anxious to unburden themselves of their frustration to stand in their places. It's nice to be able to participate in the debate. It's a lot more fun standing and speaking than trying to project from your seat, and it's an experience that, however rare, is something to be recommended.

Mr. Speaker, dealing with Bill 28. When we talk about this bill in principle, I'm certainly prepared to support it, but the concerns I have would include these things. There's a possibility that Alberta Treasury Branch will pay capital taxes, that the credit unions may pay more than the \$100 maximum that exists now, and that this would all happen by executive fiat through an order in council.

5:00

Certainly this member and I think every member in my caucus supports a move to a more level playing field for Alberta financial institutions. We think it's important that significant tax policy changes for the Alberta Treasury Branches and credit unions ought to come in as a separate piece of legislation. You know, this is the place that it can be debated. I know I've got colleagues that will perhaps get a chance before 5:30 to join this debate and offer some good advice as well. I just make these observations, for my part, that there has to be a way of making sure that tax policy changes get full legislative scrutiny.

Why? Well, just as the Supreme Court of Canada in the Eurig

case identified that we've had a range of effectively illegal taxes that have been brought in -- and before the Provincial Treasurer jumps to his feet in a defensive rush, I hasten to add that this is not unique to Alberta. There are other provinces and other governments that also have charged illegal taxes by doing it by way of regulation instead of order in council.

Some of us have watched the Eurig case as it has worked its way through the courts. You know, what's interesting, Mr. Speaker: somewhere in the bowels of the Bowlen Justice Building where 200 lawyers are slaving away for the taxpayers in the province of Alberta, working in the civil law section, there's more than one of them that has been watching the Eurig case from the time it first moved from the trial judgment level and as it has worked its way through.

The Provincial Treasurer has, hopefully, if everybody's been doing their job, been getting probably weekly updates on where this case is going. I'm sure that he was advised long, long before the Eurig decision came down, because the Supreme Court of Canada usually delivers the judgment sometimes up to a year after the argument was made. He will have been well briefed, or at least his officials will have been, in terms of where the court was going. So I can't help but think that every time the Provincial Treasurer stands up to beat his chest and say that Alberta's doing this because they didn't have to do it, well, the reality is, when you're standing in the middle of the rails on the train track and you can feel the rails vibrating and hear the noise and rush of wind and you see the locomotive headlight, you don't have to wait until you're hit to know there's a train coming and you have to move.

In this case, we've seen the train coming. I think lots of people have seen the train coming. I guess the implications of Eurig go far beyond the bill that the Provincial Treasurer introduced the other day. Here, in a case like Bill 28, we're saying on behalf of the ratepayers in the province of Alberta that just as they should be offended with the legal taxes being done in secret by order in council, similarly should they be concerned about major tax policy changes happening by secret order in council.

I know the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek understands this. I've heard him many times. I think he was probably standing about where I am now and as Treasury critic for the Official Opposition, right in the end chair here. I remember him then offering good advice to the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: You'll never stand where he stood. Never.

MR. DICKSON: I'd never suggest for a moment that I could fill his shoes. I'm just saying that geographically I'm in the same place.

Mr. Speaker, I know that that member spoke long and he spoke eloquently, as he always does, and he spoke frequently about the need for more legislative scrutiny of tax policy. So I'm counting on my former colleague from Edmonton-Mill Creek that when we get down to voting on this -- in fact I've been using *Hansard* for some of his previous comments in the House. I'm counting on him to work with the Provincial Treasurer, to encourage him to make the kinds of changes. I think there are many members here who are looking to see that kind of support. There may be other members also who think that tax policy change must be done in an open way, not in secret.

Now, I think that I recognize the need for trying to parallel and reference the federal Income Tax Act. I think it's important to streamline assessment and reassessment procedures. I think it's important to reduce overlap and duplication between the federal government and the province of Alberta. I think it's important to preserve the integrity of the corporate tax base in the province.

You know, I note some of that's happening already, because the



Alberta Treasury Department has often relied on federal interpretation, on federal decisions of the Tax Appeal Board and the Federal Court of Canada in terms of approaching assessment and reassessment actions, settling provincial objections and appeals. I think that there had been discussions that broke down in the fall of 1994 between the federal government and Alberta on returning corporate tax administration to the federal government.

So we want to see Alberta's legitimate role in the formulation and implementation of tax policy recognized, but I think we have to know in some respects that this bill is a bit of an empty vessel. I think people, whether they live in Lethbridge-West or Calgary-Glenmore or St. Albert, would like to know more precisely what further steps will be taken by the Provincial Treasurer to streamline and harmonize corporate tax collection.

This bill is a piece but only one piece in a bigger puzzle. It would have been more helpful if the Provincial Treasurer, rather than simply dropping Bill 28 on the table like a hot potato, offered some fuller and broader explanation for some of the other things he's going to do if and when he gets this bill. I hearken back to what I said before: I'm supporting this bill at second reading, but there are some questions around it.

You know, all of these questions may have already been asked in one of the government's standing policy committees. I see the Member for Calgary-Glenmore is here, and maybe all these things have already been asked in a bill review process. If that's the case, somebody could just stick their hand up, and then we could skip over some of the other points. I'm sort of proceeding because I'm assuming that these wouldn't be just little parochial questions of interest to one member, that they'd be of interest to a number of members. So if they've already been viewed in the Conservative process, then it would be good to know that.

In 1996 there was a report from Peter McQuillan and Cal Cochrane of KPMG for the technical committee on taxation. That report was made in December of 1996. It said that in the interest of simplicity some effort should be made to harmonize the federal LCT -- that's the large corporations tax -- and the provincial corporate taxes.

Then we had the report by Kevin Dancy of Coopers & Lybrand for the Task Force on the Future of the Canadian Financial Services Sector in September of 1998, and that said: a lack of federal/provincial harmonization on capital taxes leads to undue complexity; as far as possible, it would be useful to have a common calculation of the capital tax base for financial institutions across all provinces for all federal and provincial purposes.

It's important that we do that harmonization. You know, the minister of agriculture's been a leader in this province. He's recognized long ago the need for harmonizing what we do in this province with the federal government and other provinces. We've seen some other initiatives to harmonize. Will we see that same degree of farsightedness, Mr. Speaker, in implementing Bill 28?

I guess the other question is: how do we ensure that the tax burden on financial institutions has not increased as a result of Bill 28? Does anybody know that? Is there anybody in the Assembly right now that can tell us that the burden of financial institutions is not going to increase as a result of Bill 28? I don't know that, and I'm going to invite the Provincial Treasurer to stand as soon as I sit down and answer that. You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether that's going to happen. If he can't, maybe some surrogate would stand and give us that answer, or somebody could hold up a note or send a note over with the answer to that.

5:10

The Official Opposition recognizes that the banking sector in this

province has been a significant generator of jobs and highly skilled jobs, an investment that's led to the economic diversification that we hear boasted of on a regular basis by government. So let's make sure that this will truly be revenue neutral.

I guess that's one of the real questions. In the city of Calgary most of the communities I represent -- Sunalta, Connaught, Scarboro -- have seen an increase in taxes, and they say to me: we thought that the implementation of fair market value was going to be revenue neutral. Now, those are people who had been told that and assured that that would be revenue neutral, and now they're looking at a significantly higher property tax. Taxes may be different in other parts of the city, but they've gone up in almost every single community. In Calgary-Fish Creek they've probably gone down, and that's not just because they've got an able MLA. There are some other things at work there.

MRS. FORSYTH: I just want to know if he talks in his sleep.

MR. DICKSON: My point is . . . No. I've usually run out of things to say by 5:30, Mr. Speaker.

I say again that if these questions I've been asking have already been answered, you know -- I'm glad to see the Member for Calgary-Mountain View because it reminded me -- in detailed fashion at some forums through the government's legislative review process, send over the answers, and I'll sit down right now. Send over the answers. Tell me what those answers are.

MR. DAY: Sit down, and I'll answer your questions.

MR. DICKSON: I'm happy to have the assurance of the Provincial Treasurer that he's got some answers. Let me finish the questions I've got. I'm going to sit right down as soon as I finish asking the questions I have.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Closing Debate**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has invited the Provincial Treasurer on a number of occasions to rise and speak to the questions.

MR. DICKSON: After I've finished speaking.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, but what the chair is going to indicate is that when the Provincial Treasurer rises to answer those questions, that closes debate. As long as he's aware of that, then that's fine.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, what I wanted to do before the Provincial Treasurer gets up to answer the questions was make sure we'd given him the fullest list we've got of the kinds of concerns and questions we've got.

We note that when the capital base was broadened in Ontario and Saskatchewan, the six largest banks actually paid additional taxes of \$70 million annually as a result of that so-called harmonization. I don't know whether it was pitched as a revenue neutral circumstance in Ontario and Saskatchewan, but there were \$70 million in additional taxes. There are some of us in this Assembly who are going to stand up to make sure that businesses in this province aren't paying a whole lot of additional costs when something comes in that's passed off as being revenue neutral. The strength of the financial institutions in this province is absolutely vital to our economic growth in the future.

Gee, it's only 5:15, Mr. Speaker, and I've got a few more

questions, so I'll try and get them in before I run out of time.

I'll just take a wild guess that the Provincial Treasurer is going to say that we have to do this to achieve a level playing field in the financial institution sector, but we still have this problem that in the case of ATB changes can be done by order in council if this bill passes. In terms of credit unions you could simply proclaim the repeal of a section in the act by an order in council as it applies to credit unions. They could do all kinds of nefarious things if they were of a mind to.

A further observation I wanted to make about the bill is that we're almost unique on an international basis in terms of having capital taxes. Germany and certain Latin American countries have capital taxes, but the United States and the United Kingdom do not. As capital becomes more mobile, it will be deployed where its cost is less. This could mean offshore. Also, taxpayers that operate in more than one province have some ability to shift capital to where the rates are less. That's why it's so important that we get some assurances from the Provincial Treasurer when his turn comes, after all the questions have been put on the table.

MR. DAY: Now you're fudging, Gary. Now you're fudging. You said that you wanted an answer when you sat down.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to try and continue with a couple of other observations, because it sounds to me like when we get a response from the Provincial Treasurer, it's going to be exhaustive. So I want to do him a service by making sure that nothing is left off the list.

He might address in his response the fact that capital taxes add directly to Canadian firms' cost of capital. They have to be paid and paid regardless of income. As *The Economics of Bank Taxation in Canada* pointed out in their January 1998 publication: as capital is the basis for generating investment and growth, capital taxes also discourage investment and growth. Capital taxes create an incentive for banks to minimize capital, which is contrary to the regulatory

requirements that banks maintain strong capital basis, also from *The Economics of Bank Taxation in Canada*, a January 1998 publication.

I'm going to skip ahead, because I think I may run out of time to make all the observations I want to. I wanted to highlight a couple of key recommendations. One of them would be that -- this comes also from *The Economics of Bank Taxation in Canada*, January 1998 -- if the capital tax is kept, income taxes paid should be fully, not partially but fully, creditable against capital tax so that it truly acts as a minimum tax. [interjections] I'm trying to make this as interesting as I can. Between you and me, Mr. Speaker, we're going to try to keep everybody's attention in the waning moments here of the afternoon.

The other recommendation -- and I know people in Airdrie and Three Hills are interested in this too -- is that the tax burden should be shifted.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In light of what we've had to endure this afternoon, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 28. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]