

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 23, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/11/23
[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

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three distinguished Russian visitors from the Yeltsin Democracy Fellowship program. First, I would introduce Mr. Pavel Grishin, Minister of Trade of the Saratov regional government; Alexander Yakovlev, Deputy Minister of Trade; Mme Chesnokova, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Commerce.

Our honoured guests, Mr. Speaker, are visiting Alberta as part of a cross-country tour and are focusing on the government's role as a facilitator of economic growth in a market economy and in private-sector development. This program is funded through CIDA and the Yeltsin Democracy Fellowship program. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and I had the opportunity to enjoy a luncheon with this group and explore opportunities for further strengthening Alberta/Russia relationships into the 21st century.

I would ask our honoured guests in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to present an ACTISEC petition asking for a tuition fee freeze. This petition is signed by 173 individuals mostly from central Alberta: Red Deer, Lacombe, Innisfail, Benalto, Blackfalds, Delburne, Sylvan Lake, Nanton, Ponoka, Camrose, and Wetaskiwin.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to present a petition on behalf of parents from Cayley, High River, Coaldale, Picture Butte, Taber, Claresholm, Vulcan, Warner, Pincher Creek, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Lundbreck, Fort Macleod, Coleman, Bellevue, Lougheed, and Nanton, 813 names in total, urging

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

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a petition here to present. It's signed by 106 Albertans from across southern Alberta from communities including Monarch, Acme, Nobleford, Lethbridge, Calgary, Coalhurst. They're all calling on this Assembly to

urge this government to ban private, for-profit hospitals in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present a petition urging

the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, they just keep coming in, and I'm glad to say it: another 115 signatures on the petition that calls for the government to introduce legislation to ban for-profit hospitals.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition on tuition freezes I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, urge the Legislative Assembly to freeze tuition and institutional fees and increase support in the foundation of post-secondary education.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented the other day regarding WCB please be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask that the petitions I presented yesterday be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce a Bill banning the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals to ensure the integrity of public, universal health care may be maintained.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I presented to the Legislature now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the

Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

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

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's tempting to say ditto, but I guess I'd ask that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce a Bill banning the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals so that the integrity of public, universal health care may be maintained.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.
Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I presented to this Assembly be now read and received.
Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give 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 218, 219, 220, 226, and 227.

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 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 228, 229, 230, 235, 236, 238, 239, 240, and 241.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 221

Government Forecasting and Reporting Act

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure

to request leave to introduce Bill 221, which should be titled the Truth in Government Act or the Real Fiscal Responsibility Act, but in fact its short title is the Government Forecasting and Reporting Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 221 read a first time]

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

1:40

Bill 222

School (Class Size Limitation) Amendment Act, 1999

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the School (Class Size Limitation) Amendment Act, 1999.

This bill would encourage school boards to set class size targets of 17 students, K to 3; 25 students, grades 4 to 9; and 30 students, grades 10 to 12.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 222 read a first time]

Bill 223

Police (Special Constable Safety) Amendment Act, 1999

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Police (Special Constable Safety) Amendment Act, 1999.

This bill will seek a legislative change to the Police Act that would allow special constables employed by counties and municipal districts within Alberta the authority to carry side arms if supported by municipal resolution. These constables would have to be properly trained, licensed and abide by the same rules and qualifications as now required by the RCMP or any other accredited law enforcement agency.

[Motion carried; Bill 223 read a first time]

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

Bill 224

School (Principals' Duties) Amendment Act, 1999

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the School (Principals' Duties) Amendment Act, 1999.

Mr. Speaker, briefly, this act would require principals to report to law enforcement officers of their community any serious incidents that involve physical violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse, vandalism, the use or possession of a firearm or other dangerous weapon, or the use or possession of a narcotic. This would apply to the school grounds and any function sanctioned by the school board.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 224 read a first time]

Bill 225

Alberta Children's Day Act

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Alberta Children's Day Act.

This bill will recognize the importance of children in Alberta and

designate the first Sunday in the month of October as Alberta children's day.

[Motion carried; Bill 225 read a first time]

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

Bill 226
Gaming and Liquor (Lottery Fund Oversight)
Amendment Act, 1999

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 226, the Gaming and Liquor (Lottery Fund Oversight) Amendment Act, 1999.

This bill would provide for a more accountable method of dealing with lottery funds.

[Motion carried; Bill 226 read a first time]

Bill 227
Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

MR. GIBBONS: I beg leave to introduce Bill 227, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 227 read a first time]

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

Bill 228
Fiscal Stabilization Fund Calculation Act

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 228, the Fiscal Stabilization Fund Calculation Act.

This bill will assist in stabilizing the fiscal position of the government in responding to the cyclical nature of the Alberta economy thereby protecting the sustainability of social programs.

[Motion carried; Bill 228 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge East.

Bill 229
Surface Rights Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2).

This bill would allow for the Surface Rights Board to deal with issues of both occupier and other persons affected by an action and also allow for arbitration as a settlement mechanism.

[Motion carried; Bill 229 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've been advised that today there's going to be a large number of these, so let's just be a little patient.

The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a letter sent to Wayne Gretzky congratulating him on his induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the required number of letters. Sir, this letter is written to you, and I would like to read it into the record.

On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, I take great pleasure in congratulating you on your 20th anniversary serving as a long-standing Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

First elected on November 21, 1979, you have a long and distinguished career in service not only to your constituents [of Barrhead-Westlock] but to the public of Alberta as well. Indeed, you are a true parliamentarian.

Once again, our sincere congratulations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file with the Assembly eight copies of my response to Written Question 90 and Motion for a Return 53.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly five copies of an information package on the new Health Information Act, which was introduced in the Legislative Assembly November 17, 1999. It is my understanding that copies of this document have gone to all members.

MS EVANS: I'm pleased today to table the required number of copies of recent child welfare statistical information current as of October 31, 1999. Mr. Speaker, 3,709 children are under permanent guardianship, and what is remarkable is that there are 1,725 children who are over the age of 12 and have to legally consent before adoption takes place.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's with sincere appreciation to our public servants and also to the citizens of Alberta who gave us the ideas to formulate what has now resulted in an award being presented to the Alberta government by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada for organizational achievement in the public sector that I'll be tabling five copies of their report of the award, which, in their words, talks about

the cornerstones of this [government's] framework . . . the three-year business plans that specify the government's goals, outcome-based measures to assess performance . . . The business plans, financial results and outcome-based performance measures are publicly released annually so Albertans can hold their government accountable.

I will table that, Mr. Speaker, along with the quote from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada which says that "the award is regarded as one of the highest-prestige recognition programs in the Canadian public sector."

Along with that, I'll also table five copies of a quick, easy reference guide that has been printed very efficiently and inexpensively, black and white material, for all MLAs and for their constituents to refer to. It explains each goal, what results we have achieved so far, and the work that we still have to do because the work of ongoing improvement in government is an ongoing work, Mr. Speaker. We're happy to table these today.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee I'd like to table five copies of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's comments on Bill 40, the Health Information Act.

MRS. SLOAN: Whose pocket is he in?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table four copies of articles that occurred over four days from September 19 to September 22, 1999, in the Lincoln, Nebraska, paper about the excellence of the Edmonton public school system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the annual report of the Alberta Research Council, appropriately entitled Innovation for a New Millennium. I have five copies of that. The title is appropriate because innovation is truly the future of our economy. I'd like to congratulate the people at ARC and in particular the Member for Red Deer-South for the good job he has done. [applause] Well, the member can obviously see that he's appreciated by both sides of the House, so that's a very nice compliment, member.

Also, I have five copies, Mr. Speaker, of a document entitled Status Quo, Quantum Leap: the Shortest Distance. It's an information packet on ARC's technology commercialization office, because that's what ARC is about, commercializing technology for the next century.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a series of letters from R. Khan, Kim Bissett, Chantal Umphrey, Angela Moore, Eric Filpula, Sandra Maygard, and Marlo Shinyei. These letters are all urging the government to "take the next step by funding midwifery through Alberta Health care so that all Alberta families have the choice of benefiting from midwifery care."

The second series is copies of letters from Martin Arkell, Tammy McGrath, Ann Davis, and John Reid, all constituents in the Calgary area. They are urging the government to increase funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to redress the damage caused by the freeze in funding to programs.

Thank you very much.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first is a letter from the Mizeras of Ryley, Alberta, who are very unhappy with the Environment minister's ministerial order for the Beaver Regional Waste Management Services Commission.

The second letter is from Margaret Main of Chalice Road, Calgary, who is very unhappy with the proposed development of Genesis Land Development in Kananaskis Country. She expected that to be stopped with the recent survey the government did, but of course it hasn't been.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of the Good Neighbour Fund, which is a charity that is organized by CFRN television. What makes the Good Neighbour Fund so different and unique is that it operates with no overhead, charges, or costs, and the Good Neighbour Fund does not receive or

seek any government funding. Their good work continues in this community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have five copies of a memo that was sent to the New Democrat opposition caucus research director, John Kolkman, from Colleen Fuller, to whom I referred yesterday, clarifying what the carve-out with respect to health care under NAFTA is. I have an additional copy for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings this afternoon. The first is from Janet Schwegel, president of the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth. She has written to the Premier and presented a hundred letters wherein she states that she's puzzled that Albertans don't have the choice of midwifery care.

The second set of tablings is five individual letters from Carla Schneider in Lindale, Alberta; Natalie Zacher, Calgary; Sharon Reiner, Edmonton; Deborah Hobbs, Red Deer; and Patti-Anne Matty of Edmonton wherein they request that the government take the second step to fund midwifery through Alberta Health.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose I am tabling 122 letters received from University of Alberta medical and dentistry students indicating their support of Bill 208, Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I have three tablings today. The first is copies of a report commissioned by Alberta municipalities through the Canadian Council on Social Development titled Summary Statistics on Poverty in Selected Alberta Communities and a Profile of Poverty in Mid-sized Alberta Cities.

The second tabling is a direct correlation between the current government's cuts to supports for independence and a contrary rise in child welfare caseloads from the years 1992 through to 1999.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I would table copies establishing the very close and intimate ties between the owners of the Holy Cross hospital, the Huangs, and the Calgary-Varsity constituency association and MLA.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is an MLA brief on public legal education, and this has been prepared by truly one of the treasurers of this province; namely, the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta.

The second tabling, sir, is copies of my correspondence of even date to the Minister of Health and Wellness asking what will be done to ensure that Albertans' health care services will not be compromised since in his Bill 40 neither firefighters nor paramedics and ambulance services are covered.

Thank you very much.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon at 12:30 I, along with my two colleagues from this House, received cards addressed to the Premier from the gay and lesbian community. Equal=Alberta represents them here in this province. The cards are calling on the Premier to change the laws in this province so that there is equal treatment available to gays and lesbians along with all other Albertans. The card says: "C'mon Ralph, be like Mike!"

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three tablings. The first is a tabling along with my congratulations to the founders and the innovative minds behind the Canadian Learning Television network. I'd like to table five copies of their programming guide and note with some pride that the headquarters of CLT is right here in Edmonton, and their motto is "initio est demidium facti," or "Once you've started, you're halfway there."

The second tabling is a letter from a constituent to the Premier in which my constituent implores the Premier to back off his plans to privatize our health care system.

My final tabling is from one of the Premier's own constituents who sent me a note reciting her concerns about what she refers to as the "insult to democracy" that took place when the Premier paid 11,000 tax dollars for his infomercial on private health care.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, during the initial start of this flurry of tabling returns and reports, you got my attention with respect to a point of privilege?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a point of privilege under Standing Order 15.

THE SPEAKER: We'll deal with it at the conclusion of question period.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

2:00

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce some very special guests with us from Edmonton-Riverview. They are students from Our Lady of Victories school. We have 32 students with us today. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Dave King and parents Mrs. Sharon Hough and Mr. Ron Deering. I would ask all students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the other members 42 students and five adults from Forest Green school in Stony Plain. The adults are teachers Dianne Lukey and Rosemary Esposito, teacher aides Mrs. Van Straten, Mrs. James, and Mrs. Levesque. They're here, as usual, doing a very fine representation of Stony Plain. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the chair of the Alberta Conservation Association, Mr. Glen Semenchuk. Glen is here today in the members' gallery with board members of the association. They are

here today to celebrate the first publication of their new magazine *Conservation*. *Conservation* is an informative magazine and an accomplishment of which the ACA should be very proud.

Since 1997 the Alberta Conservation Association has been responsible for the enhancement and protection of fish and wildlife resources and habitat. The ACA works with government and industry to maintain and manage almost 500 wildlife and fish habitat projects.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce five citizens from the city of Fort McMurray, and they all reflect our slogan, "We Have the Energy," capturing the spirit of who we are, what we do, and how we do it, and that's with lots of energy. From the Fort McMurray public school board we have four members: their chair Sharon Clarkson, also trustees Tami Weber, Rhonda Reich, and Glenn Doonanco, who was just recently elected in a by-election, and they're all here with us, as well as Bryce Pugh, a former student and product of the Fort McMurray public school system and now a student at the University of Alberta. I'd like to ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two ladies from the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constituency. They are Mrs. Peters from Delburne, an owner of Peters' ranch and a cow/calf operator in the Woodland district east of Delburne, and Mrs. Annie Christensen from Lousana, Alberta. Mrs. Christensen is the owner of Norwood farms, a grain farm east of Lousana. They, in fact, are sisters whose grandparents came to the Innisfail area of the Northwest Territories before we were a province. They are in the visitors' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has failed to produce any research to validate his privatization scheme. We've certainly heard the usual ideological garbage but no hard evidence. Interestingly, in New Zealand in 1993 they adopted a market-based approach to health care delivery in which their regional health authorities purchased services from a variety of providers, including private hospitals. According, however, to a 1998 study the result of the New Zealand reforms were higher operating costs, higher deficits, and higher wait lists for surgery. My questions are to the Premier. What hard evidence does the Premier have that his proposals are going to do anything more than rip medicare apart?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I find it highly offensive that this hon. member would use the word "garbage." I can picture the hon. member 10 years ago. If the opposition had ever suggested that she was spewing garbage, she would have gone ballistic. It's quite amazing. I used to sit very, very close to her, and I used to see how emotional she would get when opposition members used that kind

of language. Isn't it funny that when she goes to the other side of the House because she couldn't fit on this side of the House, she can find time to use that kind of unfitting language.

In regards to the research, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that when Bill 37 was pulled, we established a blue-ribbon panel to do a thorough examination of the kind of legislation that we would need to introduce to not only provide choices but to protect – protect – without question the public health system as we know it today.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier importing the New Zealand health model, that has resulted in longer waiting lists and higher operating costs? Can he explain it to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're not importing anything. [interjections] No.

MS LEIBOVICI: Have you forgotten Sir Roger Douglas?

MRS. MacBETH: Well, yeah, that's right. Roger Douglas, their consultant that they hired back in '93.

Why, Mr. Speaker, when New Zealand has abandoned their experiment, does this Premier continue to blunder down the same road to failure?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, New Zealand is 10,000 miles away. This is Alberta. What we're doing is for the benefit of Albertans, to end suffering, not, as the Liberals would suggest, to prolong suffering. That's what they want to do. We want to end suffering and provide choices and still protect the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. That's what it's all about.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MRS. MacBETH: The Calgary regional health authority has become nothing but a branch office of this government. Chairman Dinning was handpicked by and serves at the pleasure of cabinet. The interim communications contract was handed on a platter to the Premier's communication consultant and spin doctor, Rod Love, and the former deputy minister of Executive Council, Jack Davis, was parachuted in as the chief executive officer of that authority. So, Mr. Speaker, it's little wonder that they are so secretive when it comes to spending Albertans' money, because like their masters, they put the business interests of third parties over and above the interests of the people and the taxpayers of Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Given that every year the Provincial Treasurer produces a list of the company names and the dollar amounts of the contracts paid by the government of Alberta, why does the Premier not require his appointed health authorities to do exactly the same thing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, all health authorities, including the Calgary regional health authority, are required to abide by the rules and the laws of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. These people know how that act works. I mean, they use it all the time at great, great taxpayers' expense when basically they could pick up the phone and probably get the information. No. They would rather waste taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, it's very strange that the hon. member would mention Jack Davis, you know, a dedicated and loyal public service employee who went to the Calgary regional health authority, doing a fantastic job; Rod Love, who as a matter of fact they would have liked to have hired, I'm sure, because he does a masterful job of getting the message across.

2:10

I find it strange that she wouldn't mention the key player in all of this, Jim Dinning. They were the best of friends. He ran her campaign. They were good, good, buddies, Mr. Speaker. Now, why wouldn't she mention Mr. Dinning? I mean, they were great buddies at one time. What happened? Do politics separate friends? My goodness.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier likes to avoid answering questions.

I quote from the Auditor General's report.

The total cost of approved capital projects, total authorized cost, and costs to date for each are not reported in the Estimates when annual funds are voted each year by the Legislature nor are they reported by the Department of Health, PWSS, or health authorities.

Will the Premier make good on his promise to have his minions reveal to taxpayers what private health companies are receiving exactly and how much public money is being spent on it?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't know Jim Dinning to be anyone's minion, including the hon. leader's minion.

Mr. Speaker, RHAs operate under the act, and they are all subject to audit. They are all subject to audit.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, they are not available, and the Premier knows it.

Why is this Premier refusing to let out the real story about exactly who is benefiting from his privatization scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the true story is out there. The blue-ribbon panel reported. The policy document is out. RHAs throughout this province are subject to the same rules of FOIP as we are subjected to.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Third official opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier believes that by repeating the words "suffering" and "choice" like a mantra, he can disguise the facts. The reality is that the Premier cannot back up his claim that his new policy will provide more choice or lessen suffering. In fact, when one strips away all the rhetoric, this so-called choice is really no choice at all. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier say that his choice will be cheaper since private hospitals will have their facility fees and profits included as part of their contract with the regional health authorities?

MR. KLEIN: Again, you know what's so frustrating about this kind of questioning is that they either refuse to read the policy statement or they read it and won't understand it or can't understand it. I suspect it is the latter. They can't understand it. Quite clearly the policy statement says that one of the conditions of contracting is that there must be a cost-benefit analysis. It must be clearly demonstrated that there is going to be a cost benefit to the regional health authority, and it has to be to the satisfaction of the minister.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to read the policy. Read the policy, and if you need, I'll have the hon. minister sit down with you to explain it line by line. You know, I thought she was an intelligent individual who could understand these kinds of

things, but if she needs a tutor, I will personally have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness sit down with her to explain it line by line. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark does have the floor, and I would really appreciate hearing her question.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can't the Premier understand, can't he see that the only choice his policy is going to offer taxpayers is that their dollars are going to be diverted away from the public system and funneled into private hands? Can you understand that, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I refer to the policy that is out there now for discussion. Nothing is carved in stone at this particular time. We're asking all Albertans to provide their input, including the Liberals. We're asking people to really provide constructive input into this particular policy before it's introduced into legislation next spring.

To answer the hon. member's question, Mr. Speaker – I forget what it was. Oh, no. I can understand. I can understand. Yes. The question was: the Premier can't understand. I can understand everything about the policy document. The people who can't or won't or are too thick maybe to understand it are the Liberals. We understand it. The Alberta public understands it. The only people who can't understand it are the Liberals across the way.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What choice is the Premier providing when it comes down to a so-called choice between an underfunded, second-rate, public system created by your government and a private system lacking accountability and accessibility to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take great offence to that. We have a first-rate system in this province. It underwent very significant restructuring, but now we have a pathway to health that makes sense.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from Tommy Douglas, who really was the father of medicare in this country, and this comes from the film *Folks Call Me Tommy*, which was released in 1982. He says:

When we began to plan medicare, we pointed out that it would be in two phases. The first phase would be to remove the financial barrier between those giving the service and those receiving it.

We believe in that fundamental principle, that no person ever should lose their home and their dignity because they become sick. This is a fundamental principle across this country, and it speaks to the principles that we uphold dearly, and those are the principles of universality, accessibility, portability, and all the other principles contained in the Canada Health Act.

He says, "The second phase would be to reorganize and revamp the [whole] delivery system." Reorganize and revamp the whole delivery system: that's what we started to do in 1993. That's what we're continuing to do. "Of course, that's the big item," and that's the "thing we haven't done yet." We are now doing it, Mr. Speaker. We are now doing it, and I think that if Tommy Douglas were alive today, he would be very, very proud.

MS BARRETT: Well, that takes some chutzpah. No kidding. I'll remember this, Ralph. Quoting Saint Tommy out of context like that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. He got me off track. It's his fault.

Health Innovation Fund

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I do find it deplorable. I find it deplorable that the government is using the taxpayer-funded health innovation fund to expand private, for-profit care in this province, and one way the government is doing it is by proliferating the number of private clinics contracting for acute care services that used to be and should be done in public hospitals. Will the Premier rule out allowing private clinics and the proposed private, for-profit hospitals from dipping into the taxpayer-funded health innovation fund, and if not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness answer this question in detail. I just want to make one comment, though, and again it's an answer in the form of a question. Is the hon. member suggesting that we get rid of all contracted services for cataracts and abortions?

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the health innovation fund is the result of recommendations from the comprehensive review that was done of overall health care funding in this province, sometimes known as the Laing report. The fund that's been established is to be open to applications from people within the health care system. They could be private practitioners, that is doctors. They could be nurses. They could be people who are administrators within regional health authorities. In the policy statement which was released today, there is a process outlined for those innovations, those new ideas being carefully assessed and recommended for funding. This is an initiative that the hon. leader of the third party across the way knows has existed for some time. We have now the resources and we have the plan in place to act on those recommendations.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, the existence of 52 private clinics already operating in Alberta shows that they're hardly an innovation, and to answer the Premier's question, I believe all medically insured services should be done through the public system. Yes, Mr. Premier.

Now . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hold on, hon. member. Sit down, please. Sit down.

MS BARRETT: He asked me to answer it.

THE SPEAKER: You don't have to listen to the answer. It's not a bait to get you to give an answer. So please proceed with your question. You've given one heck of a long preamble there, so make it short.

MS BARRETT: Yes. Will the Premier confirm that some business people are lobbying to set up a private surgical clinic, a.k.a. hospital, in Grande Prairie and financing it with money from the health innovation fund?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge of any such transaction. Perhaps the hon. minister does. I don't know.

MR. JONSON: I do not either, Mr. Speaker, although I know that there are quite a large number of very good ideas and proposals out there that will have the potential of improving health delivery in our health care system. They come from all parts of the province and all parts of the system.

MS BARRETT: Instead of opening up private surgery clinics in places like Grande Prairie, why doesn't the government provide funding to reopen the three closed operating theatres at Grande Prairie's Queen Elizabeth hospital? Isn't that a better use of the tax dollars?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question is specific to the Mistahia RHA, and I'll have the hon. minister respond to it.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recently met with the board of the Mistahia regional health authority and members of their administration. We went over their funding projections for the coming year and of course the recent announcements of government with respect to deficit elimination, with respect to long-term care support and funding, and of course we were looking ahead to the budget year that will be considered by this Assembly next spring.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that there has been the expansion of secondary health care services in the Queen E. They are actually offering a number of programs in that central hospital that were not there before the so-called cuts that they portray across the way, but certainly there were budget reductions. We have reinvested. There has been reform within the system. The Mistahia region has one of the best community-based, public health based systems in the province, and that is recognized by people all across the province. So I think that while there are certainly challenges for the Mistahia region, they are in a position to provide good service, service that in many cases was not there before.

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

Calgary Francophone School Board

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Learning has announced that a new Francophone education authority will be in place in Calgary by September 2000. A number of my constituents have indicated to me that they would like their children to continue to attend schools currently operated by the public and separate school boards. Can the Minister of Learning outline what choices are available for these parents and their children in light of the new election?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd be more than happy to respond to that. As the hon. member knows, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada ensures that Francophone education will occur in all provinces in Canada where numbers warrant. What we have used for the "where numbers warrant" clause is 250. So what that means is that Francophone school boards will be brought into existence where there are 250 students or more involved. In Calgary there's nothing that I've seen to show that there would be less than that, so a Francophone board will occur.

Mr. Speaker, the interesting part about this is that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not guarantee exclusivity, which means that the public board and the private board have the right to offer French immersion, have the right to offer French programs. What I foresee happening is that once the Francophone board is in place, the Francophones with the separate and the public will sit down and rationally come to a conclusion as to what to do about French education in Calgary. Hopefully this will allow the choice that the hon. members' constituents are asking for.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The election for members of this new Francophone authority was scheduled to take

place on November 29 of this year, but it's now been rescheduled to January 10, 2000. Can the minister please explain why there has been a delay in holding the election?

DR. OBERG: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Quite simply, what happened is that the Calgary co-ordinating committee did not follow the local elections act. They did not advertise two weeks beforehand. They did not advertise enough. They were quite embarrassed by the mistake they made, but it was a mistake that was made. They subsequently have changed the election to January 10. This in no way will change the date of implementation of Francophone governance in Calgary.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, thank you. My final supplemental to the same minister: why is this election even necessary if you're going to appoint the members to the new Francophone authority?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, this is by far the most democratic way to determine who should be appointed, and obviously I will respect . . . [interjections] I guess the opposition doesn't think it is. Obviously I will appoint the people that are elected.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Mental Health Association October 1999 briefing notes have as its number one recommendation an immediate freeze on capital replacement at Alberta Hospital in Edmonton and Ponoka. It appears, though, that the number one priority for the Department of Infrastructure is capital replacement at Alberta Hospital Ponoka. In fact, work has already begun there on \$100 million of capital renovations. To the Minister of Health: with the other provinces closing mental health institutions and with mental health associations calling for decentralization and community delivery of mental health services, why is the government doing exactly the opposite?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly I think the budget and business plan of Alberta Health demonstrates the increasing commitment that has been made in relative terms to community mental health across this province, but there is still the need for hospitals to treat the mentally ill. I think that is also verified by experts and people who work on a day-to-day basis in the mental health field.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is the same question that was asked, I believe, a year ago, and I acknowledged that in terms of the criteria rating scale for capital projects both Alberta Hospital Ponoka and Alberta Hospital Edmonton were on the list. I indicated that as they worked their way up the list and there was funding available, they were being considered for approval, and in both cases there is some reduction in the number of beds in the overall plan that is being put forward.

Mr. Speaker, good quality hospitals and care of that type are needed, and we are going ahead with the capital renewal.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the minister as well. Why are psychiatric patients being turned away from hospitals and mental health programs in cities due to underfunding when there is \$100 million for an institution that just happens to be in the minister's own riding? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The minister of health has the floor.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is quite correct that Alberta Hospital exists in Ponoka, and many of the buildings have been there since 1912, so that is quite a . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: A little bit before you.

2:30

MR. JONSON: A little bit before me; that's right.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are a couple of other things that should be mentioned. There was some reference to construction already having started, which is not true with respect to the capital project. I imagine the member across the way knows what a sewer lagoon looks like. That's being cleaned out, and banks have been raised and so forth this summer. It happens to be alongside the highway, so that's maybe what his informant noticed. But, yes, it is on the approval list.

Since he's talking about my constituency, I would just say that for the province you have I think an excellent brain injury treatment and rehabilitation centre there. You have very good work going on in the whole area of psychogeriatric medicine. I could go down the list of a number of other accomplishments there, so I think quality health care is being provided.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Premier. On one hand, the Premier says that he needs private hospitals so money isn't spent on bricks and mortar, and on the other hand he announces a gold-plated brick and mortar program for Ponoka. Why the double standard, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's all about striking the right balance. Yes, there will be upgrades to hospitals. Perhaps in the future there will be new hospitals in this province. It is about facing today's dynamics. Certainly the dynamics of medicine and the kinds of afflictions that the system now deals with – well, the hon. minister alluded to a specialty centre at the Alberta Hospital at Ponoka relative to brain injury, relative to geriatric dementia.

I would like to show this chart. It's from the Calgary regional health authority, and it was attached to their news release in appreciation of the additional funding that was sent to the RHA. Mr. Speaker, what this chart shows is really how the expenditures in medicine have gone. Quite clearly, from ages 55, 56, 60, 64, 65, 69, 70, 74, 75, 79, 80, 84, 85, and 89 the charts rise dramatically, absolutely dramatically.

What we're dealing with today are the anomalies of afflictions associated with an aging population. Those are precisely the kinds of services that are now being contracted. Cataract surgeries, again, an affliction associated with the aging process, joint replacements: this is where the lineups occur, Mr. Speaker. We don't spend millions and millions and millions of dollars to build hospitals to accommodate these anomalies. They are here today, and 15 or 20 years down the road there may be something different.

Mr. Speaker, this chart shows very, very starkly what we are dealing with today. We are dealing with the anomalies of an aging population. I'm part of that population, a good many members of this caucus are part of this situation, and a good many members of the Liberal caucus are part of this population, the so-called baby boomers. We were warned about 15 years ago that this was coming about. The minister of the day, who is now the leader of the Liberal opposition, had the chance to do something about it, had the report in her hand, and did absolutely nothing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Aboriginal Adoptions

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In February of '97 the government introduced a policy whereby a child who was a band member could not be adopted without the consent of the band. This was implemented as an interim policy until the government, First Nations, and Metis people sorted out ways to ensure effective planning for aboriginal children in care. Unfortunately, this policy has left many children in limbo. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. What is the current status of this policy?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are making every effort to keep homes available to expand our opportunities for aboriginal children, and there is progress being made. We have reduced the number of aboriginal children in our welfare caseload from 41 to 37 percent in the last two years, and although we are still subject to band consent, we are working with the Metis and First Nations people to enhance those opportunities through a number of programs.

Mr. Speaker, I think there's a very real and critical need here that the band chiefs and the child welfare directors on reserves talk to me about, and that is balancing their important cultural heritage with the need to find good homes for the children.

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that more aboriginal children find appropriate permanent homes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to digress. I talked yesterday about some of the publicity that we are giving to ensure that people understand the needs for children that are aboriginal, but I want to cite also the open custom adoption project by the Yellowhead tribal agency. The goal of the project, in fact, is to promote the adoption of First Nations children and to have permanent guardian status by aboriginal families.

Mr. Speaker, we are working to translate the home assessment materials and to work with the languages of Cree and Stoney so that aboriginal families who may have an inclination to adopt these children have access to information that would encourage and support them in their quest to provide good and permanent homes for the children.

MR. SEVERTSON: Also, to the same minister: what is the government specifically doing to improve the lives of aboriginal children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, one of the foundations of the child and family service authorities is improved services for aboriginal children and families, and we are working hard to find aboriginal mentors and staff that would work not only in the department but on the front level with social workers and to become increased advocates for children in need in aboriginal families. All of the 18 child and family service authorities have aboriginal co-chairs and have members of the aboriginal community to be sensitive to the policies that they are developing for children in need. We recognize that only 7 percent of children in Alberta are aboriginal, but 37 percent of our caseloads are aboriginal children. There is an additional complication because children that are over 12 also have the right to refuse adoption.

A number of the aboriginal staff are taking particular interest in developing cultural linkages with the communities. We believe partnership is the key, Mr. Speaker, and we're working very hard to enhance our partners at the local community level.

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

David Thompson Regional Health Authority

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer the Red Deer and District Family and Community Support Services Board and the Transportation Advisory Board prepared a report commissioned by the David Thompson health authority looking into the difficulties in accessing health care in the region. Lack of appropriate transportation and the costs of transportation were cited by many respondents as barriers to receiving health services required. Seniors who don't have transportation to get to pharmacies and doctors, ambulances being used as taxis, thousands of dollars wasted going back and forth to Edmonton and Calgary: the list goes on in the report. My questions are to the minister of health. What is the minister doing to fix the problems with health transportation in the David Thompson health region?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think there is some inconsistency across the way. It seems that on the one hand one member across the way doesn't want health facilities in rural areas and that on the other they do.

The transportation system or network that a regional health authority has, Mr. Speaker, is their responsibility. I'm not doing anything specifically at this moment to get in there and manage the David Thompson health authority. Yes, they do provide interfacility transfer, and yes, we do have to use Edmonton and Calgary for the specialized services that are offered there and appropriately so, but that is part of an overall integrated health care system. I am not aware nor has the regional health authority brought to my attention that they feel they are not able to cope with this challenge. They have a plan in place. They're working with agencies for their input, such as the member mentions, and it seems to be working.

MRS. SOETAERT: My second question to the minister. So you remain arm's length. You're not going to explain why they're short of handi-van buses. That's nothing that you are going to be involved with, Mr. Minister, at all?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, since this is the day to find out where I live, I happen to live in the David Thompson health region, and I have, I think, pretty good contact with the regional health authority board. I'm sure they would draw it to my attention if they felt that they were being unfairly treated or something with respect to our allocation of funding. If there was some other particular problem that was a responsibility at the provincial level, they would draw it to my attention. I know that they do have an interhospital transfer capability. They do move patients around when they need specialized care. That is part of a regional health authority's normal operation.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final question is to the Provincial Treasurer. What budgeting process does this government use to decide that spending \$40,000 on a brand-new four-by-four for the Treasurer takes priority over adequate funding for handi-vans for the seniors and the people needing health care in Red Deer?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no \$40,000 vehicle for the Treasurer or for any minister in this government. It's up to MLAs to make a choice in terms of having the government purchase a vehicle or, in fact, charging mileage, and with the amount of miles that I put on, it is far less of a burden on the taxpayer. That's up to

each one, just as members of the Liberal caucus would have to decide, for instance, how a member who lives in Edmonton could charge \$9,000 in gasoline to drive back and forth from their office to the Legislature. That's about 200 trips a day to the Legislature. I don't question that. The process we use is based on which dollars are going to be stretched the furthest for the use of the taxpayer. That is always the question with which we look at every one of our spending decisions. How can we save the most tax dollars to the taxpayer?

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

Natural Gas Pricing

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many constituents have contacted me concerning the costs of heating their homes. As we move into winter, my constituents are seeing their gas bills increase yet again. The home that cost \$80 a month to heat a year ago will now cost well over a hundred dollars per month to heat. My first question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Could the minister explain why natural gas utility costs have increased so much in recent years?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, that question probably is one of the greatest number of phone call increases to MLAs and to this minister's office that we've had in a long time. The simple answer is supply and demand, but to the person that's seeing their rates go up 25 to 35 percent, that's not much comfort. In reality natural gas has become a fuel of choice in North America. With the increased pipeline capacity that we have, there is no disconnect now in the marketplace in all of North America, and indeed we are paying a price here in Alberta that reflects the real price of natural gas as it relates right through to Chicago.

The other thing is that the suppliers of natural gas can only get back the actual cost of that gas. Therefore, they have to apply – and they have applied two or three times this year – to the EUB to set those prices as the price goes up and comes down. The fixed charge on your bill is that of transmission and metering and distribution, and that has been fairly stable over the years.

I must reflect also that Albertans probably pay and do pay the lowest price for gas because of our proximity to the resource. In Edmonton on November 1 it was \$2.87; in Vancouver, \$3.64. This is the actual price of gas, not with the transmission. Toronto was \$3.26 a gigajoule, and Atlanta was \$5.05. So Edmonton still records the lowest natural gas prices in North America.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, the first supplementary question to the same minister: can the minister advise the Assembly as to whether he expects prices to continue increasing or remain as high as they are now and why?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, that's a speculative question, not the purpose of question period. Go on to your third one.

MR. BRODA: Okay. Mr. Speaker, my final question is going to be to the Minister of Community Development, who is responsible for seniors. What assistance is there for seniors who are on fixed incomes and who may have trouble paying these rising utility costs?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that rising utility costs have the greatest impact on people on fixed incomes, and certainly we're concerned about the impact on seniors. As most

members know, we have the Alberta seniors' benefit program, which covers lower income seniors, and I'm very pleased to say that under the previous minister a special-needs program was introduced.

Now, this program does cover specifically what it states: special needs. If the cost of these utilities trigger the seniors involved being put into dire straits, we'll certainly look at helping them through that program.

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

Poverty

MRS. SLOAN: Poverty is a root cause of ill health. Two reports released by the opposition today show that the highest concentration of poverty in Alberta exists in youth aged 15 to 24. Wetaskiwin has 29 percent of its children living in poverty. Lloydminster has the highest poverty rate for single parents, at 69 percent. Over 20 percent of Alberta's seniors over the age of 74 are poor. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why does the province leave it to municipalities to commission such reports when it is clear that poverty is a provincial and public policy issue?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously poverty is of great concern to this government, and poverty is certainly an issue when we deal with issues such as the preceding question that was asked to the Minister of Community Development. We do try and deal with poverty in a very pro and affirmative way. Certainly the program that the Minister of Community Development has just illustrated is one of those ways that we deal with those who are less fortunate. We recognize the fact, and we try to develop programs that deal with those who are less fortunate than some of us. Ultimately, the program where we provide rent supplements, the programs where indeed we deal with those that have restricted budgets are in place. We continue to monitor them, and if they're not adequate, then we will review them.

MRS. SLOAN: If that's the case, Mr. Minister, why is it only municipalities that are publishing the statistics?

To the Minister of Children's Services . . .

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. Whoa. Let's get on with the question and skip the preambles.

MRS. SLOAN: To the Minister of Children's Services: why is there no dedicated provincial program anywhere to address the depth of child poverty in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to cite some of the very programs that are dedicated by our government to child poverty: the Alberta family employment tax credit, \$49 million for child care subsidies, subsidies in day care, extended health care coverage, and early intervention programs. This year we moved from \$2 million to \$18.4 million. We've strengthened the Maintenance Enforcement Act. We've got a welfare program that gets people back to work. We're integrating planning of children's services around Alberta and working through the Alberta children's initiative to partner with other ministries. We've got communities involved in delivering children's services at the local level and addressing the issues of poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I would contend that we not only have support for families that are in poverty; we have increased the dollars by 41

percent in the last three years for the deliverance of the child welfare caseload. We are targeting families who are in need.

2:50

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Was it this government's intent to bury these reports, leaving the problem for the RHAs and children's authorities to solve?

MR. DUNFORD: No, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that reports like this do come out. I think it's important that people in Alberta get a look at various opinions and perspectives. I would just want to make sure the audience today, though, would note that one of the reports that was released is citing 1995 figures, and everyone in Alberta knows that a lot of things have happened since that particular time.

One of the interesting notes in the report that was tabled, the Profile of Poverty in Mid-sized Alberta Cities – it is the report of something that's called the Canadian Council on Social Development, based in Ottawa – is that they persist in using low-income cutoffs, LICO. I would just hope that all members of this House, but especially the hon. member that mentioned the question, would realize that we're trying to work with the federal government. Every jurisdiction in Canada is trying to move to market-basket measurement and away from LICO, because, hon. member, even your federal cousins don't like that as analysis of poverty. The poverty lines are old, outdated, and obsolete.

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

Hub Oil Company Fire

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past summer we saw a terrible tragedy occur at the Hub Oil recycling facility in Calgary. Two men died. Over half a dozen got injured. Many more lost jobs. A number of residences were affected, and a very important used-oil recycling facility in Alberta was completely destroyed. Representing our member colleagues, I met and shared with those affected our deep concern. As I understand, there were pressure vessels on-site. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What was the status of these pressure vessels?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker, this was a terrible event that did befall the residents in Calgary and certainly one that is of great concern to all of us. The member is correct: there were pressure vessels in the facility. There were two pressure vessels in the facility that indeed are under the auspices of the Safety Codes. Both pressure vessels are of safety code inspection status. The one was just inspected. The other pressure vessel was actually down, waiting for an inspection. So in both cases the pressure vessels were either just inspected or down and not operating. Further to that, though, neither pressure vessel was damaged, so it would be very, very unlikely that the pressure vessels had any function regarding this terrible disaster.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General has commented in the past on the issue of the inspection backlog of pressure vessels. My question is again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister provide an update on the status of this backlog?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: This is a priority issue for us, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to say that as far as public vessels are concerned, the backlog is about 2 percent. This is something that we've been

working on. It's something that we have prioritized and are working very vigilantly to see that indeed we're totally up to date as far as inspections are concerned. More people have been hired to do inspections, and we will continue to put a high priority on seeing that these vessels are properly inspected.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For my final supplemental I'd like to ask the minister about the type and the progress of the request from the city of Calgary for provincial disaster assistance related to this unfortunate tragedy.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We have just received the application from the city of Calgary earlier this month. It's being reviewed at the present time by staff. As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, there are certain items that are eligible for disaster service funding, items, for example, like overtime costing, policing for overtime, and the likes of that. Items that are insurable are not eligible for disaster service funding because there are other means of funding that particular element.

So at this stage the application has arrived from the city of Calgary. It's being reviewed at the present time by our staff, but as I mentioned, items that are insurable are not eligible for disaster service funding. Whatever items are not covered by insurance certainly will be considered; however, items that are insurable will not be eligible.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call on three hon. members for members' statements. We'll go in this order: Banff-Cochrane, Edmonton-Centre, St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Vic Lewis

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, November 12, I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the opening concert of the fourth annual Vic Lewis Band Festival at the Banff Centre. I was able to witness a cultural pillar in the Bow Valley and the namesake of the festival, Mr. Vic Lewis, receive a lifetime award and become an honorary member of Phi Beta Mu, the international fraternity of band directors. It was moving and appropriate that many of the 800 students from across the province attending the three-day festival were there that evening and rose in standing ovation to show appreciation for Canmore's inspirational music man.

Mr. Speaker, I found it so fitting that this man was honoured for his many years of musical contributions in the Bow Valley and that we recognize him today. Vic moved to Canmore in 1923 when he was 11 years old. His father, a very talented musician, told him: if you want music in the valley, you'll have to go to the kids. So he did, impacting the lives of hundreds of young musicians and bringing the joy of music into the Bow Valley. He established two major youth band programs, one in Canmore and one in Banff. Over the years Vic taught himself and others to play guitar, string bass, accordion, trombone, piano, cello, and drums. As well as working with young people, Vic organized concerts in the miners' union hall in Canmore and played across the province with other notable local musicians. He has also been the official bugler with the legion for over 60 years, and his unique talent has been passed on to younger generations as his children and grandchildren are also blessed with the gift of music.

Vic's contribution to the cultural fabric is so great that the Vic Lewis Band Festival, named in his honour, has been and will be an

annual event for many years. It will be a continuing tribute to a terrific musician whose legacy Bow Valley children are now enjoying.

I ask Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in honouring Mr. Vic Lewis for his great contribution to our communities and to this province. Thank you.

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

3:00

Famous Five

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Famous Five Foundation of Calgary for making my life a little bit more inspired. This group has raised the money, selected a national jury, and commissioned an Alberta artist to create a monument commemorating the Persons Case. You see, there aren't many women from Canadian history that girls and women today get to hear about or be inspired to emulate, especially feisty, inspirational women, women who got the job done and then let them howl, to quote one of the Famous Five. Sadly, we still don't include the Famous Five in our Alberta school curriculum, so it was very important to me that a big gesture was made and the Famous Five Foundation, headed by Frances Wright and directed by a board and a volunteer corps of fabulous women, made that happen.

I attended the unveiling of the five sculptures on the corner of Olympic Plaza in Calgary on October 18, 1999. Our new Governor General, Her Excellency Adrienne Clarkson, officially opened the monument, a special treat and very appropriate. Albertan Barbara Patterson was the artist chosen to design the monument. She has designed an interactive, inspiring, and attractive commemoration. The sculpture depicts the five women at the moment they receive the news of their success. Two of the women, Nellie McClung and Irene Parlby, are entering the room holding up the newspaper which declares: Women are Persons. Henrietta Muir Edwards raises her teacup in a toast, and Mrs. McKinney claps her hands. Emily Murphy stands beside an empty chair on which visitors may sit to join the scene and the celebration. The sculptures are all larger than life and cast in bronze.

The Famous Five Foundation will be unveiling an identical sculpture in Ottawa on Parliament Hill next October, in the year 2000. On December 1 right here in the Alberta Legislature Building we will be celebrating our own Famous Five exhibit consisting of a set of portraits on loan from Alberta artist Alice Tyler. In response to lobbying from yours truly and many, many others, the portraits will be located on the fifth floor and included on the regular tour of the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

I hope we will find a suitable location for the large portrait donated by the women of Alberta in 1931 of Louise McKinney, the first woman elected to a Legislature in the British empire. She was elected right here in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Capital Region Governance

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member in this Assembly for St. Albert, a city of 50,000 people, I rise to speak about the strength of our city, the effective and accessible municipal government, and its unique identity within the capital region.

One year ago a review was initiated and a process of determining how we want the region to look and to be in the future was established. Throughout the various stages of this process St. Albert has demonstrated a mode of co-operation and co-ordination in exploring

options to structure the various services in the area so that our capital region can compete globally.

The capital region has worked well in a number of areas. At this time I would point out that the Capital Region Alliance was formed voluntarily and has worked collaboratively in creating a transportation plan for the region. Throughout this discussion our community has recognized the importance of maintaining St. Albert's autonomy and celebrating the diversity within the region. Our mayor and council and residents of St. Albert believe that talk of annexation is not the way to go. Such talk is at best arrogant and at worst ignorant of all the players. We in St. Albert believe in working with the recognized process. We believe in working with our neighbours.

As an example, I would ask everyone to consider the European situation. To enhance the strength of their economy, European countries have established the European Common Market and a host of other initiatives to their credit, yet they have not adjusted their respective governance boundaries. We can create a strong capital region which can compete in the global marketplace without having one member suggest a takeover of another well-run community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of privilege.

Privilege Reflections on Legislative Officers

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today, during tabling of reports, there was a statement made by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview which, in my humble submission, offends this House and breaches the privileges of this House and is one that should be dealt with most severely.

The Member for Peace River was tabling a report from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who also serves in the role of Ethics Commissioner for this province, and while he was making that tabling, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said, "Whose pocket is he in?" That statement, in my view, goes beyond, as *Beauchesne* 69 on page 20 says, "inflammatory," "disagreeable," or even "offensive." It goes far beyond inflammatory, disagreeable, and offensive, and we know that the member is prone to making those types of statements. But a statement which draws into question the integrity of the Ethics Commissioner of this province, who is an officer of this Legislature, an officer of this House, is in my view, in my submission to the House and to you, sir, a reflection of impropriety in the House. It's a reflection on the House as a whole, and it is indeed contempt of this House.

I would refer you, Mr. Speaker, to section 59 on page 18 of *Beauchesne*.

Traditionally, articles . . . reflecting badly on the character of the House . . .

It says "articles in the press reflecting badly on the character of the House," but I would submit that a statement in the House is even more inflammatory.

. . . have been treated as contempts. . . the House judged an article written by a Member to be a "scandalous, false and malicious libel upon the honour, integrity and character of this House, and of certain Members."

I would suggest that one could go further to include an officer of this House, such as the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, I would refer you also to *Erskine May*. On page 112 of *Erskine May* it refers to questions of "Corruption or impropriety." To suggest that someone is in someone's pocket is clearly a suggestion of impropriety and corruption. It's tantamount to an allegation of corruption on behalf of the Ethics Commissioner. If the Ethics Commissioner does not have the full confidence of this House and the people of this province, the Ethics Commissioner cannot do his job. The Ethics Commissioner is an officer of this

House, and if the integrity of the Ethics Commissioner is brought into question, the integrity of this House is brought into question.

Mr. Speaker, I won't belabour the point any further other than to indicate that section 118 of *Beauchesne* on page 29 indicates that "a complaint of a breach of privilege must conclude with a motion." I would move that this House find a breach of privilege of the House under section 15(2) of our Standing Orders and in that breach of privilege condemn the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for the statement that she's made, demand a full and unequivocal apology not only to this House but to the Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Commissioner, who is an officer of this House, and refer the question of breach of privilege and contempt of this House to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for such further action and sanction as that committee might recommend to this House.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect, I think my friend has skipped a step. As I understand Standing Order 15, well before we worry about the text of any motion he may or may not put, the issue, with respect, is for you to determine after hearing a brief and relative argument whether a prima facie case has been made. If you should make such a determination, then I understand it's open for certain members to propose certain motions. We're a long way from that stage.

Firstly, let me say this. The procedure in Standing Order 15 is clear. The words that have been put forward and now are in the record are: "Whose pocket is he in?" Let me say that what you have to deal with, what we have to deal with ultimately in terms of the prima facie case is that there's no identification. It was the MLA for Peace River who was speaking at the time and who tabled a report. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, there may be members that will have their chance later, but right now I'm trying to direct my comments to you in your determination.

3:10

If you look at the record, one may say: "Are we talking about the MLA for Peace River? Are we talking about the Ethics Commissioner? Are we talking about the Information and Privacy Commissioner?" That's not apparent on the record, Mr. Speaker.

The provision is this. If you look at Joseph Maingot's text *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, which, I submit, is the real authority in terms of parliamentary privilege, it specifically talks about the process, but it also talks about the issue. I'd make this observation, sir, that in Maingot's text on page 210 he talks about — and I'd say just assume for a moment that the reference were to the IP Commissioner. As I say, that's not on the record, but if we made that assumption. We look at page 210, and he talks there about protection afforded to officers of the House executing orders, orders of the House of Commons in that case. He says:

As a general rule, however, any person interfering with an officer of the House while he is executing an order of the House could be held in contempt of Parliament because such action is an affront to its authority.

So, once again, if we made the assumption that the reference was to the commissioner, a legislative officer, and not to the Member for Peace River, we would have to find, firstly, that there had been interference. If you look at "interference" in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, on page 523 it talks about coming into "collision or opposition." I've always understood interference to mean to impair or prevent someone from doing his work.

The second part is: while executing his order. This is from the text set out by Joseph Maingot. While executing his order, the commissioner has delivered an opinion to the House, as he has the

power to do under section 51(1)(f) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, where he may "comment on the implications for freedom of information . . . of proposed legislative schemes or programs of public bodies."

The third item I was going to say with respect to that is that Maingot on page 11 of his text talks about parliamentary privilege in terms of the most fundamental part of parliamentary privilege being the freedom of members to speak and speak freely.

The other citation you might have reference to is *Beauchesne* 64, Reflections on Members. We have a case there where a member was referred to as "a cheat and a swindler," and that was found to in effect offend the notion of privilege. But if you look over to the next page, to article 69, this, I think, is the operative part:

The Speaker has reminded the House, "It is very important . . . to indicate that something can be inflammatory, can be disagreeable, can even be offensive, but it may not be a question of privilege unless the comment actually impinges upon the ability of Members of Parliament to do their job properly."

The further provision I'd make. I look through *Beauchesne*, and there's reference at clause 111 to employees of the House. That doesn't apply because the IPC is clearly not an employee of the House.

I think that the heckle that has been referred to by the Government House Leader – I can understand the reference to that being offensive. I understand that it's something that certainly may well inflame, but in terms of making the kind of assumptions that the Government House Leader has made in his analysis, I think it is unwarranted on the record. Having said all of that, I also know that my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview had wanted to make an observation, as well, on the question raised by the House leader.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you. As you knew him, I think you would agree with me, Mr. Speaker, that Grant Notley would roll in his grave over this incident. I am absolutely appalled that the member who uttered that statement was smiling, almost laughing while the Government House Leader was moving his motion, and she's smiling again. I have respect for this institution. [interjections] Thank you, hon. members. I can at least say that about the government members.

I have never heard such an offensive remark in this Legislature, and believe me, my time here goes back a lot longer than some of you know and a lot longer than I probably want to admit. I came here after the 1982 election to work as Grant Notley's researcher. I spent a lot of time up there in that gallery, and I've spent a lot of time on this floor. I find the Liberals' trying to interfere with these comments quite offensive.

I am making the case, Mr. Speaker, for you to find that a prima facie argument for privilege has been made so that this matter can go to committee. I will tell you why I am so incensed. I hear comments like this all the time, but in this particular case, when you attack an officer of the Legislature, someone who is hired by an all-party committee, if you do not have the guts to go back to that all-party committee and express either your disappointment, your disillusionment, or your regret about some action of that person, that officer, then you don't have the courage to hold public office, period.

Earlier today the Premier referred to a comment or quote from Tommy Douglas. As is well known, I have been a New Democrat for 34 years, and I am proud to say that I have been raised in the most honourable version of politics; that is, you don't poke your fingers in other people's eyes no matter what the circumstance, unless it is a declared war.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you to find a prima facie case in this matter, and I urge this matter to go to Privileges and Elections. At Privileges and Elections I urge the members of that committee to call upon several Liberal members who have made so many derisive comments in my presence about the IPC and Ethics Commissioner. I want them on the record. Have the courage or walk out.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the rules under Standing Order 15(6) certainly allow the Speaker to "allow such debate as he thinks appropriate." We have heard at this point in time from the Government House Leader, we've heard from the Official Opposition House Leader, and we've heard from the leader of the third party. Now, we're going to have to bring this matter to a conclusion before too long.

So I have a choice now. Both the hon. Member for Peace River, who seemed to be part and parcel of this, and the Deputy Government House Leader – the two of you look at one another and defer to one another; okay? [interjection] Yes, you will be next.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am also cognizant of the time, and I won't take a lot of time. I'd like to counter one of the arguments made by the Opposition House Leader, and I'd like to refer you to page 120 of *Erskine May*, where under the heading "Other indignities offered to either House" it states as follows:

Other acts besides words spoken or writings published reflecting upon either House or its proceedings which, though they do not tend directly to obstruct or impede either House in the performance of its functions, yet have a tendency to produce this result indirectly by bringing such House into odium, contempt or ridicule or by lowering its authority may constitute contempts.

Mr. Speaker, by extrapolation, I believe it would be appropriate for you to apply that principle just described to the situation at hand.

I'd also like to make a couple of very brief remarks with respect to how serious the comment made by the member was. It's serious because the hon. member across the way does not seem to appreciate in any way what she has said. I was watching her closely during the remarks by the hon. leader of the ND opposition. She was smiling throughout. She was attempting to interrupt her, and at one time she was scowling. It's this type of behaviour that, quite frankly, I have witnessed for two years, and it's about time for it to stop.

Thank you.

3:20

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to finally be able to speak on the matter. I think the comments . . .

THE SPEAKER: No. Hon. member, please sit down. I'll make this very, very clear. Recognition would have gone to the hon. member right at the start, but the hon. member's colleague, the Official Opposition House Leader, rose in place. So, please, get to the point.

MRS. SLOAN: My point is, Mr. Speaker, under *Beauchesne* 69:

The Speaker has reminded the House, "It is very important . . . to indicate that something can be inflammatory."

I would acknowledge this afternoon that it is obvious that I inflamed the Government House Leader if the remark I made was directed. However, it was not made identifying any member. As my esteemed colleague for Calgary-Buffalo pointed out, there is no evidence that it was made against the officer of the Legislature.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, given the extent of this debate and the

precious time that we have in this Legislature, I'm prepared to withdraw the remark at this time so it is removed from the record.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the five legislative officers are responsible directly to this Legislature, but they don't have the opportunity to speak here or present or table reports personally. These officers, through the protocol that has been established, send these reports to this Legislature through the Legislative Offices Committee, which is an all-party committee, and I considered it my privilege as vice-chair of that committee to table the report.

I consider it despicable that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview should suggest that by virtue of following this protocol, of having a member present the report on behalf of one of these esteemed officers, she should consider either that officer or myself, if you want to interpret in whichever way either the Member for Calgary-Buffalo or the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is trying to twist this – either way it implies that the officer of this Legislature is in someone's pocket or has someone else in his pocket who is a member of the Legislature.

I know that the member has withdrawn the remark, but I think that's far short of either apologizing – and I think the commissioner certainly deserves an apology – or whatever such action as you see fit, as recommended by the Government House Leader.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a point of privilege was raised under Standing Order 15(1). This is a very serious situation, a question of privilege.

A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of the parliamentary rights of any member constitutes a question of privilege.

There are quite a number of sections with respect to this, including section (6).

The Speaker may allow such debate as he thinks appropriate in order to determine whether a prima facie case of breach of privilege has taken place and whether the matter is being raised at the earliest opportunity, and if the Speaker so rules, any member may give notice not later than at the conclusion of the next sitting day of a motion to deal with the matter further.

So there's an opportunity to hear arguments, and I suspect that one important part of the argument is actually what was said. Fortunately we do have excellent facilities with *Hansard* in this Assembly, and it operates very, very quickly.

So let me put the text back into the record. It says, "The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River," at which point in time Mr. Friedel, who is the hon. Member for Peace River, rose and said:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee I'd like to table five copies of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's comments on Bill 40, the Health Information Act.

Then *Hansard* Blues records: "Mrs. Sloan: Whose pocket is he in?" Then *Hansard* says, "The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning."

A year ago I rose in this Assembly and I dealt with a similar situation and gave a ruling, and the ruling is found in *Hansard*, November 17, 1998 – almost to the day. An opportunity was offered this afternoon to a number of hon. members to deal with this matter. I'm going to now look to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept an opportunity offered to her by the chair to rise and say more than simply: I choose to withdraw my remarks. I will sit down and I will wait.

MRS. SLOAN: I rise, Mr. Speaker, and apologize for my remarks.

THE SPEAKER: This is all being recorded in *Hansard*, and I appreciate all members participating. I think all members would do well to read *Hansard* of a year ago, the date which I gave you, in which we dealt with a similar matter. The conclusion at that time was that the chair says, "The chair is rather disheartened by the unparliamentary language used in these statements and is very disappointed" about certain things happening. I echo them today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess we're talking again about language. I would cite section 23(j):

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Under that section the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek stated about Alberta Hospital Ponoka, and I quote: Ed, you should be in there. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning was posing a question to the minister. I see the smiles over on the other side. Well, this is not only insulting language, Mr. Speaker. It is inflammatory, and it is making a mockery of those people who need mental health services.

Quite frankly, mental health services are underfunded and inaccessible to those who need them. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has experience through visiting these institutions, and she recognizes the deficiencies. A report was put out, that she's aware of, with recommendations.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that when issues of importance are brought forward and the issue is addressed, I don't expect any members of this House to perpetuate the stereotypes that exist of mental health patients, nor do I expect any member of this House to insult another member of the House by making derogatory comments on the issue. So I respectfully put it to you that there is a point of order and that an apology would be in order as well.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, thanks for allowing me the time to speak. The remarks that the member of the opposition is making – by saying, "Have you been there?" I was asking the member if he had been to the Alberta Hospital.

I had the privilege of doing a report for the minister of health in regards to the mental health facilities and mental health in this province about three years ago. I and the hon. Member for Little Bow and the hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod spent a lot of time at that hospital, and what the remarks were saying was the fact that that hospital in Ponoka is in desperate, desperate, desperate need of repair and actually should have been done three years ago instead of now.

So when I was making my remarks to the hon. member on the opposite side when he was being critical of the capital spending on the Alberta Hospital Ponoka, it was: have you been there to see what terrible condition it's in?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The chair has the Blues in front of him, and there is nothing in the Blues with respect to any statements being recorded, so the chair will have to deal with the comments made by the two hon. members with respect to this matter.

The only conclusion the chair can reach with respect to this is that if all hon. members would shut their mouths when recognition has been given to a particular hon. member, then perhaps the efficiency of this Assembly would be much greater than it is. Secondly, we

wouldn't have these kinds of events that we've now dealt with twice today.

3:30

Several hon. members have sent me a note with respect to the previous breach of privilege and said, "Is that it? Is that all?" Well, the answer to that is yes. This chair had directed members to the text of November 17, 1998, but we'll just deal with one additional quote given at the time. Again, it goes with a statement that was given, and I quote from myself a year ago:

Language spoken during a parliamentary proceeding that impugns the integrity of members would be unparliamentary and a breach of order contrary to the Standing Orders, but not a breach of privilege.

The question was: do you think it was a breach of privilege? The precedent is certainly there. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on two occasions stood up and at one time said: I withdraw the remark. The second time she said: I apologize. So that wraps up that matter.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, with respect to that ruling, under 13(2) I'd ask for a further explanation because in my humble submission, by asking for an apology, there was an implication that a prima facie case had been made that there was a breach of privilege. In my humble submission, an apology and certainly an apology in the nature that was given is not sufficient. If there was a breach of privilege, then we should have the opportunity to debate a motion of privilege on a matter that's of this serious nature.

I'd like a further explanation, then, as to when we could proceed further to deal with the question of a motion of privilege if simply affording an opportunity for a halfhearted apology is sufficient.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, I will respond to your question. In terms of an explanation, the chair has heard the comments from hon. members and the chair has heard emotion. That's important, and that's part of the business we're in. The chair has also pointed out that this matter's been dealt with in the past, and this matter probably will be dealt with again. Under 15 and 15(6), until the chair believes that a prima facie case of privilege has taken place, nothing will happen. The chair has ruled that this is not a prima facie case of privilege, and there are no further proceedings on this matter.

Having said that, the chair also pointed out that in the chair's view this was really not the best use of language, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview at one point in time stood up and did withdraw the statement. That doesn't mean it's going to be eliminated from the *Hansard*. It will remain in the *Hansard*. Then the chair also gave the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview a further opportunity to clarify the remarks, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview expressed an apology.

That's where this matter has come to today, and that's where this matter ends today other than the comment that the chair had indicated that it would do us all well to recognize that when a certain member has the floor, other members should just button it.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Children's Services in Schools

514. Mr. Herard moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the govern-

ment to expedite the delivery of multidepartment children's services programs to operate directly within our school system.

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce Motion 514 for debate. I want to make it very clear that this motion is not intended to be critical of this government's children's services programs, because we have some of the best and most co-ordinated and, recently, award-winning services and programs in all of Canada. Rather, the purpose of this motion is to address how these programs are delivered in our communities around the province.

Right now I see some inefficiencies and differences between the vision of these services and the delivery, where the rubber meets the road in our communities. We have talked about having services delivered in our communities since 1993 and have strived to make our services more accessible to those who need them. As I see it, it's not enough change as to exactly where the services are being delivered. Not enough change has occurred. The goal of this motion is to suggest that one of the most effective places for delivery of some of these programs is at ground zero, right in our schools.

I would first like to talk about some of the positive initiatives our ministries are taking in this area of children's services to illustrate the length to which this government has gone to ensure that our children and parents have top-notch programs and supports available to them and to acknowledge that, yes, there are some good things that are indeed happening in our schools.

Now, children's services underwent a thorough change with the Children's Initiative: An Agenda for Joint Action, which gave the Alberta government and its ministries a clear vision and policy framework to better serve Alberta's children through greater focus on community-based solutions. The initiative reflects the government's commitment to ensure Alberta's children are well cared for, safe, successful at learning, and healthy.

One of the programs currently operating in the school system is the students' health initiative, which is focused on maintaining the good health of Alberta students, and \$25.6 million annually has been earmarked to build a strong partnership that will ensure Alberta's children have the support and the access to services that they need.

Another example of children's services programs undertaken by our government is the Safe and Caring Schools initiative. This initiative illustrates our government's priority to have an education system that helps Alberta's young people become independent, self-reliant, responsible, caring, and contributing members of society. It's around this notion that I will be making most of my comments, Mr. Speaker.

One final example of an initiative undertaken by this government is the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution. This paper came as a recommendation from the Task Force on Children Involved in Prostitution, which was chaired by my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek. The key idea of this paper was that children involved in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse and need protection. Since this law is currently before the courts, it would not be appropriate to deal with it in more detail. As we have seen in the media lately, this is a timely issue for the government to have acted upon and is yet another example of proactive legislation undertaken by this government for our kids.

As illustrated by these various programs, the Alberta government is clearly taking the lead in ensuring that our children have the best possible resources available to them and forming policy that hopefully addresses issues before they become unmanageable.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, for all of these great things that our government has done, I feel there is room to do more. This is why I've put forth Motion 514. I believe that our good programs can get better delivered through focusing on community-based solutions at the school level. This is why I'd like to spend some time discussing the merits of further integrating children's services into our system. By that I don't mean that every department that provides services to children needs to be in every school.

Our school system is moving towards school-based decision-making, where the teachers, who know their students best, in concert with the principal, parent councils, and professionals from Health, Children's Services, Justice, and AADAC get together to discuss the demographics of that school's community to assess and decide which resources are needed to give every child the best opportunity to be the best student that they can be. Every school is understandably different from every other, and no system of one size fits all can possibly provide the professional services individually needed in our schools.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

So where would we say children's services would best be delivered? Would it be in a building in which children are rarely seen, an intimidating, centralized, clinical environment, or would it be in a place where children spend the majority of their formative years? Madam Speaker, I think the answer is easy. It seems logical that the best place for the delivery of multidiscipline children's services is right within our school system. It is here that those delivering the valuable services that children need would have first-hand knowledge of the diversity of challenges that exist in each community and which programs and supports are right for the vastly different needs of each community.

3:40

Now, my view that the service would be better provided in the school system is really not a criticism of the professionals or the services provided in our province. The job that these people do is very vital to the well-being of our children and families and our society at large. Today our professionals can only address the problems that currently are referred to them or come across their desks. By having professionals in the school system working on a day-to-day basis with students, their parents and siblings, getting to know their various situations and needs, they would naturally be better equipped to identify and deal with a child's problem. They could also address challenges before they escalate into more serious problems.

Madam Speaker, our teachers are doing the best they can, but they're not trained as social workers or nurses or justice or addictions specialists. The amount of time spent in all of these areas by caring teachers takes away from their primary function, which is to teach. By having the services at the front line, where they're needed the most, children and parents would have access to programs much faster than if they were sent to an institution outside the school. There would be a much faster response time in getting people coordinated with the good counsel that they need. In a lot of cases this is vital for solving problems before they escalate. If families at risk can be identified and then helped expeditiously in a caring, safe environment, the chance of mitigation increases greatly.

Madam Speaker, having children's services integrated into the school system would benefit parents as well. With the various services available within the school parents would be more comfortable using them. What I mean by this is that the perceived stigma of

using services such as those provided in centralized clinical facilities would decrease if those resources were available in the schools. Parents wouldn't have to go to an FCSS building; they would simply have to go to their school. Now, what's more natural than that?

Many times families simply do not know how to deal with the situations that arise in the normal course of raising children. Where do we as individuals learn to be good parents? Do any of you recall learning parental skills at school? I certainly didn't, and I was in a difficult situation myself when my children were growing up. I had not had access to parental training and, like most people, was simply doing the best that I knew how to do. Problems arose, and fortunately my wife convinced me to take a parent effectiveness program, authored by Dr. Thomas Gordon, who incidentally is now 81 years of age, still going strong, and still writing very effective books on relationships of all kinds. I'm not sure if he's related to you, Madam Speaker.

I discovered that the problem was not with my children but simply that I did not know how to communicate effectively when they had a problem or I had a problem or the relationship had a problem. The techniques are very different for each of these cases. So I think that parents in many instances may simply be in need of advice on parenting or help in other related areas and should, in my opinion, have access to this help in a safe and caring setting, like a school. With some services within the school system, parents' comfort in using them would increase. Having parents that are willing to seek help when they need it would be of great benefit to the well-being of their children, which is something that our government is constantly striving for.

Unfortunately, prevention is not currently a big part of the equation. Our professionals all too often only get involved when the situation is already a problem or out of control. The problem of alcohol, soft and hard drugs, bullying, behavioural problems, abused and neglected children, and nutrition are a reality in our schools, and our teachers need on-site help to deal with all of this. I'm not talking about schools far away or across the border. This is reality right here in Alberta, and we only see a small part of it in the news. Never before have children and families been faced with the intensity and opportunity for these kinds of problems and tough decisions about their path in life. This is why anything that we as representatives of this province can do to improve the delivery of children's services where they're needed is a worthwhile endeavour.

Madam Speaker, Motion 514 addresses the realities that parents and children face today. The purpose of this motion is to get our government to follow through on where children's services are delivered. As a government we work hard to ensure that children will be healthy. We have focused on improving the plight of economically disadvantaged children, and we have made strides in delivering more community-based programs. But if our program delivery remains within the walls of our centralized social services buildings, then what have we changed? Is the delivery of the service in our community simply a nice concept but nowhere near where the rubber meets the road?

Madam Speaker, we've all heard the saying that it takes a whole community to raise a child, and I'm one who truly believes that the total involvement of our community, including our employers, is vital to turn our kids on to the tremendous opportunities that this province has to offer the next generation. Imagine how difficult it is to turn on kids who through no fault of their own are at risk in their development, children from dysfunctional homes, homes that can be turned around through appropriate support.

Madam Speaker, the children of Alberta deserve the full support of our government in their sometimes difficult journey to adulthood.

Having the proper programs and services available to the family unit within our school system will be, in my opinion, the most effective change that we can make and be true to the vision that has been talked about since 1993.

I urge all members to support this motion. Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to rise and speak to Motion 514 urging the Legislative Assembly to "urge the government to expedite the delivery of multidepartment children's services . . . directly within our school system." The need for a co-ordinated plan with respect to children's services is a reality that's not lost on this member, and it certainly makes a great deal of sense that a strategy proposed should be delivered through a facility that exists in almost all of Alberta's communities.

We know and the reports released this afternoon show that "the average poverty rate for all communities in Alberta was 18.4 per cent." That has been further re-enforced with the statistics that relate to aboriginal and child poverty, which I'd like to just identify for the record. It was reported in the mid-sized Alberta cities report that

Aboriginal people in all cities were at least twice as likely to live in poverty than their non-Aboriginal neighbours. In Lethbridge and Red Deer, over half of the Aboriginal residents of those cities were poor.

Now, let me speak specifically about children in those categories.

Overall, children in single-parent families [in Alberta] were more than five times more at risk of living in poverty compared to children in couple families. The figure also shows that poverty among children generally decreases with age. In both family types [couple and single parent] children under 6 were the most likely to be poor. Furthermore, a sizable 72.1 per cent of children this age living in single-parent families were living below the poverty line.

Those families and those children, Madam Speaker, I would suggest are in crisis, and to date we have not seen actions by this government that have in effect alleviated that concentration of poverty in Alberta communities.

3:50

Granted, there were announcements about the focus on fetal alcohol and the focus on prostitution, but the root elements of poverty, Madam Speaker, relate to income. They relate to housing and they relate to education, and we have not seen this government have a co-ordinated strategy to address that.

In 1995 in Canada 45 percent of the population over 15 did not have a high school graduation certificate. In Alberta the rate was higher, 47 percent. So the only flaw in the hon. member's argument this afternoon is that there's a large portion of specifically children that are not in school, because they've opted to drop out or because of other reasons, and his proposed plan wouldn't reach that child or those families.

Further, in Alberta 21 percent of persons without a high school diploma lived below the poverty line. Nationally the rate was slightly higher in that case, at 24 percent. Again, the proposal before us this afternoon is not in effect going to address those issues.

I'd like to talk also about the issue of housing and income. I don't know if the hon. member or any colleagues across the way have strategies to address that. They are certainly not within the purview of the children's ministry, but we have statistics now in Alberta where 45 percent of the population own a home with a mortgage, but most poor Albertans, 59 percent, rent their homes. Further, for

families in Alberta with a mortgage the average monthly shelter costs are \$1,093. For poor families with a mortgage the payments average \$947 per month. A very minimal difference, Madam Speaker.

Schools and the Children's Services ministry cannot alone address that reality. We do not have a public housing program in this province. We do not have a public housing strategy. We have seen the government look to the private sector, look to the real estate sector, look to the municipalities to address this issue, and all of those stakeholders are saying: we do not have the ability to address the critical shortage of public housing in this province. That is a responsibility of this government. So with due respect to the member, I believe he offered this sincerely and it is a good proposal, but there are root causes that this strategy will not address.

In relation to income sources and poverty, again just some statistics from the report on poverty in selected Alberta communities. The average earnings for a family in Alberta in '95 were \$51,300. Among poor families the average was only \$10,400. Income from government transfers averaged \$6,400 for all families and \$6,000 for poor families in the province. That's a root cause, Madam Speaker, of not only the poverty but some of the developmental problems that we have been struggling to deal with in this province.

The average earnings were lowest in elderly families. Among all elderly families in Alberta in '95 earnings were only \$29,600 and only \$7,100 among the poor elderly. Government transfers were much higher among elderly families than among the other family types, and for all elderly families income from the government transfers averaged \$17,000 per year. For families below the poverty line the figure was \$13,100. That's another component that this motion won't address.

We have concentrated poverty in our senior population, and those individuals, Madam Speaker, are not going to have cause to go into a school in this province. They are isolated as it is, and when we speak about wanting to address an issue like poverty, it cannot be addressed. While it's important to focus on particular age groups, it is something which is affecting the province and our well-being for all ages. Those realities can't be ignored. While it's laudable for the government to get up, to speak about their announced initiatives, to put forward a motion, when they're not examining the critical shortage of public housing and they're not examining the issues related to education levels and income levels in the province, it can't make much of an impact, but it's certainly a place to start.

In concluding my remarks, Madam Speaker, there are certainly a number of other areas that we could speak about, but I want to allow other members of my caucus to also get on the record. There is the disabled community and poverty amongst disabled individuals that also must be acknowledged. Part of that relates to the changes and the restructuring of AISH benefits, but putting processes into the school system is not going to reach that population.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I conclude my remarks. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to enter into debate on Motion 514, which is sponsored by my colleague from Calgary-Egmont. Motion 514 urges this government to encourage the delivery of multidepartment children's services to operate within Alberta's school system when the need warrants.

Madam Speaker, over the course of my years in government I've been privileged enough to be part of improving the services that we deliver to children. This includes chairing a task force on young

offenders and the children involved in prostitution and in my previous life working as a crisis counselor in Calgary and also my role as a mother. These experiences have given much insight into the obstacles and challenges children face when growing, and it is with this insight that I speak today.

Our government has spent a lot of time and resources in re-examining how children's services are delivered in our province. This extensive examination led to the conclusion that the most effective method of delivering children's services was through the community-based approach, not a bureaucracy-driven approach. It was also determined that the various departments who have a vested interest in children's services should co-ordinate the delivery of their programs and supports. This means that instead of decisions being removed to a far-off government building, we would put the services and the method of delivery within Alberta communities.

Madam Speaker, our government took some crucial steps in moving towards this type of system with the introduction of the children's initiative An Agenda for Joint Action. This initiative is our government's working plan for implementing children's services in our community. It is based on achieving four goals that the departments of Learning, Health and Wellness, Justice, Community Development, and Children's Services committed themselves to achieving. These goals are that Alberta children will be well cared for, safe, successful at learning, and healthy.

These standards are the basis for improving the lives of Alberta children and represent the commitment of our government to its children. It is my opinion that this Motion 514 will help us through these standards. By encouraging multidepartment children's services to operate within the school system, we would effectively and expeditiously be moving in the direction our policy statements say that we should be moving. Allow me to spend some time outlining why.

Madam Speaker, this motion is an attempt to get the services to the people who truly need them most. As a government we have moved towards this community-based approach with things like the children's initiative, yet we can still move closer to the action, I believe. We have established 18 child and family services authorities across the province to provide the local planning and solutions that the new system will be based on. These authorities are the groundwork for our community-based system through a dynamic new partnership between Alberta communities and the Alberta government, a partnership that launched a major grassroots process of social development unique in the history of Alberta. At local, regional, and provincial levels comprehensive planning is now in the advanced stage for the creation of a community-based system of child and family services.

4:00

Yet if a child or family has a problem that requires the use of one of our many services available, where would she or he go? Currently they would go to the same government building that has probably been there for years. There would still be the physical barriers in getting the services children and families require. In some cases, as well, these authorities are seen in the eyes of Albertans as a barrier, a level of bureaucracy that hinders receiving help.

Again, Madam Speaker, these authorities are a step in the right direction, but do they go far enough to ensure our children will have fast access and the best possible services if needed? By having services co-ordinated in the school system, they would go to the next vital step in providing the things I just discussed. If a problem is identified, the child would have the quickest possible response time in receiving services. They would potentially alleviate problems

before they grow into something worse. Physicist Stephen Hawking once noted: if you leave a problem, by nature it will get worse. This is the thrust of Motion 514, providing government services in a timely manner where they are most needed.

Madam Speaker, as my colleague from Calgary-Egmont illustrated in his lead speech and as I have reiterated, there are several important benefits to Alberta children through service delivery in the school system. Now I'd like to shift my discussion to the benefits that parents would encounter in the system that Motion 514 proposes, because we cannot overlook the importance of parents in the lives of Alberta children.

Parents in need of services or advice when parenting their children will find it much easier under the plan that Motion 514 advocates. First, we must realize that it's not easy for parents to admit that they need help in raising their children, so when a parent considers using one of the programs or supports available, we as a government must ensure that the process is open, nonthreatening, occurs in a timely manner, and, most important, is known to the people who will use it.

Madam Speaker, as it stands, this is not happening. As my hon. colleague from Calgary-Egmont can attest, in speaking to people throughout the province, there is a real problem in awareness of what is out there. Often what happens to children or families in need of services is they don't know which department to call for services. This leads them on a wild-goose chase for the correct sources and in the end often turns people off using what's available. This is not a criticism of the department, but it's a reality in this province.

The child and family services authorities established across our province have started the progression to community-based services, yet the problem with the authorities is that they still form a barrier to direct delivery of services to Albertans who need them. As well, many people are turned off because they are afraid of the perception of others in their communities. The stigma of having people in your community question your ability to parent or your integrity itself is something that parents consider when debating whether to use our services. This is unfortunate but can be a deterrent.

Madam Speaker, these concerns I have raised are a reality in Alberta, and the proposal of Motion 514 would do a lot to alleviate these problems. What Motion 514 proposes is not a great diversion from our government's policy. In fact, it is exactly on-line, just taking it further, to the schools, where a need for services would be easily identified. By having children's services programs operating within the school system, parents would be able to access a system that is responsive to the needs and provides access in a timely manner. They would allow parents and their kids to use services in an environment they are familiar and comfortable with, thus decreasing the stigma I talked about. In fact, in some cases this might even encourage more parents to use more services.

It is easy to understand that if we improve the stability of Alberta families, Alberta children will benefit. If this happens, our government has taken a giant step in achieving our goal of creating the best possible environment for our children to prosper. And I don't mind saying that Alberta is only as strong as our children.

Finally, I'm going to discuss the logistics of Motion 514, because I think this is a major point of contention. There is the concern that implementing such a system would create a bureaucracy nightmare and would further tax our education system, which has already got great demands on it. This simply won't happen.

Motion 514 would distribute existing service providers from government buildings to schools when needed. This motion does not advocate the wholesale movement of social workers, counselors, or care providers into every school across the province. In the smaller schools there might be less of a need to have full-time

providers there every day, whereas in the larger schools they might warrant it. The basic idea is that we take our skilled, trained people and get them where they are needed and allow the teachers to do what they do best, and that is teach. This would be a much more effective method of delivery and would improve our children's lives.

Madam Speaker, Motion 514 would in fact create a system that can adapt to situations when needed. This is the type of proactive legislation our government is based on, creating new and community-oriented solutions that improve on the status quo. So, my colleagues, I urge you to support 514, because it will take us in the right direction on policy for children. The initiatives our government is undertaking are commendable. They start the process with a system of collaboration with our communities and attack bureaucracy inefficiencies. Yet where they stop is precisely where Motion 514 picks up, having children's services programs in our schools, the place our children develop and grow. It seemed like a logical place. Parents benefit, children benefit, and Albertans benefit.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with pleasure I rise to support this particular motion. I believe the motion as it's stated has a lot of merit. It states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to expedite the delivery of multidepartment children's services programs . . . directly within our school system.

I can't think of a better place to deliver services in a multidisciplinary approach, if you will. The school has a special and significant place in families. It's a place where children and youth feel comfortable. It's certainly a place where in fact the teenagers tend to hang out, on the school grounds, whether the school is closed or otherwise open, and where parents feel safe taking their youth and their students. The largest concentration of children in this province is in the school system, and therefore it makes sense to deliver many of the needed services in this environment.

I sort of think about my own constituency when I'm thinking about this motion. I have a constituency of high-needs schools, and we have some specific high needs in the area. Many of my parents of schoolchildren don't necessarily have access to a vehicle. Transportation is an issue for them. For some of them telephone access is an issue. They can't necessarily get to where they need to be, and in many instances that's difficult for them. To me this creates a bit of an environment where they feel safe going, and it's local. It creates a true community school.

I think it's important to note that if we look at this from sort of the crass economic perspective, we can use the infrastructure that exists. In fact, we can get rid of those utilization rates because a school becomes occupied, and those are arbitrary rates set by the government. In my constituency every now and then there's a report that says that we need to close four or five schools, either public or Catholic, that they're going to cost too much to repair or they're not being utilized to the capacity the government would like, yet we prohibit the school from being open for other services.

4:10

I like the idea, and I think this is a great initiative for inner-city environments, where we would be able to deliver services to families in a much more structured and accessible way. But one thing that would have to happen, Madam Speaker, is that the government

would have to change in order to consider a school full. So they would have to just dump the arbitrary utilization rates and allow the school to be used for these other services that can be delivered.

I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said that there wouldn't be a wholesale move of social workers or service providers to the schools. Well, that would be fine. In some of the schools it sure wouldn't hurt to have a social worker at the school, to have a health provider there at defined times and those kinds of services available. In fact, I recall, Madam Speaker, that as a police officer I had a particular school in the area that I was policing, and one of the things they often called on me for was to access children's services. The reason they did that is because the school counselor would make a call and might not be able to get a response from child welfare until the next day. If they believed the issue was urgent enough, then they would call me. The school in fact paged me on my day off so I could respond to some of these needs, and I think that shows sort of the expediency that this type of service delivery would provide.

The other thing is that we have to look at the resulting cost savings. The schools are already there, the infrastructure is there, they're heated, and they're staffed, and in my view it would cost less to increase the capacity of the services that are in-house as opposed to entirely new buildings, staff, and resources. Because this government only looks at the bottom line when it's looking at the services it provides, I think this is a viable approach for this government. In fact, they could even look at the cost savings, not just the fiscal cost savings but the human cost savings, and that far outweighs any short-term goals over the long term.

We also know that parents in high-needs areas have difficulty accessing transportation to get downtown. Many times they don't have bus fare even to get downtown for an appointment. What that might mean is that for a child who needs to see a doctor or a nurse or a social services worker or a psychologist, those services aren't available. They're not close, so the child goes without and doesn't receive the services they require.

In fact, the province of Ontario had a royal commission called For the Love of Learning, and it was through this commission that it was identified that this is the type of delivery that will exist in the future. So the need to look at where we're going and how we're going to deliver services is important. We can no longer afford to have each government department or otherwise operate within its own vacuum. We have to have justice talking to social services who's talking to education who's talking to health. We have to have all of this incorporated, because they're all interlinked and, in my view, interdependent when it comes to children. So I would certainly advocate that all members of this House support this particular motion.

I have to say that the government has decentralized services to families and children so much that it creates a difficulty right now with parents actually being able to find the department. In my constituency people are always phoning to find the department they need to contact for a certain issue. I can't think of anything more frustrating, quite frankly, than to have everything so decentralized that you don't know where to go. When you have a parent who is in crisis or who has a child that's in crisis, the last thing they need to do is phone five, six, or seven different people – that's providing they have a phone to do that – to find out where they can access services for their children. So given that the government has created a problem, I would certainly be supportive of the hon. member's motion to help clear up the problem. It must be noted that there is a duplication of services, and certainly this type of thing would be reduced with the type of delivery that would occur under this scheme.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I'll take my seat, and hopefully

other people will speak in support of this particular motion. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise as the new Minister of Children's Services and not only accept but heartily endorse this motion and urge that this Assembly pass the motion.

There is a saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child. When you reflect on the roots of Albertans, especially in rural Alberta, you note that at one point the community school, the one-room schoolhouse, was the focal point for absolutely everything, from the church service on Sunday to the math class on Thursday afternoon.

My belief in this motion stems from the fact that the schools today are going to be even more pivotal in the delivery of community service tomorrow. Globally, besides global competitiveness, competing economic interests, defining performance measures, one of the realities is declining birth rates. Although that phenomenon has hit Japan and China with a vengeance, we do not have that type of phenomenon here. But I would make the point that as we build sound and sturdy school buildings, the ultimate end use of these school buildings may well be for community uses beyond the scope of the school. Particularly in inner-city neighbourhoods and other places where the declining population or the demographics allow the space, I think there is certainly no spatial problem to be addressed.

Today, in an address to two groups of school board members from across the province, I posed the motion that Mr. Herard had mentioned and received tremendous support for the ideology behind the motion; namely, a team support, working environment within a school. It makes imminent sense.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Children's Services, newly comprised, is a ministry that has a history in its short life of networking with other ministries. Through the Alberta children's initiative we have had ministries that have participated through justice programs, through programs geared to mediation and family counseling, programs for community development, and by attending the community seminars and discussing the family preservation models and other models of caring for families. We have had huge support from the schools, the Ministry of Learning and in the past the ministry of education. We have worked diligently on services for the handicapped and for early intervention and prevention and improved services for aboriginal children.

Our government and indeed the 18 regional authorities that are in place, Madam Speaker, continue to work closely in the development of the transition of staff and funding and other resources and are most anxious for the outreach to schools and school boards within various children's authorities to set up and design the most appropriate local delivery systems.

4:20

We have new community-based child and family services authorities in all parts of the province who are working to remove the barriers. Currently for children and youth in Alberta there is strong support by clear-thinking people for trying to create the most efficient and economic and viable and useful entity for housing all of the services that children would require. A loving family environment; support of solid health, education, and social programs; and support of community services through schools and conveniently located access points are conducive to a quality of life that most people prefer to enjoy.

Our province has a huge range of programs and services to help address issues and challenges that are known to those families and

the children at risk. Some of the services are delivered by government and some by boards or authorities, some also by nonprofit organizations, but through the children's initiative and the co-ordination through the children's initiative we've seen linkages built already with schools so that teachers, health service providers, mental health workers, day care operators, and foster parents are all working as partners to help a child who's in the welfare system.

Madam Speaker, today with much confidentiality protecting the best interests of the child, I think there are some real positives for those children that are forced by whatever reason to exit the school system to be able to find right within the same facility some respite or at least some counseling and some counselor willing who could in fact ensure that dropouts in the school system don't become societal dropouts and, worse yet, adults with severe and critical problems. Community support workers and law enforcement workers are right in the schools in many of our jurisdictions already providing support in case management, early intervention for the family, and other services. The teams of professionals that work together to meet the needs of individual children and families have made a difference.

Madam Speaker, I would cite the tragedy in Taber that occurred in April of this year. There's no doubt that that community, with the articulation between family and community support services, the schools themselves, the co-ordination with the health authorities and the justice authorities – all of the participants there ensured that counselors were in the school within 10 minutes. That would not have been possible, I'm convinced, if there hadn't been strong relationships, a team of workers that understood the environment and worked co-operatively together and who knew each other face-to-face. Frequently one of the problems is that people don't recognize the people that are working in those kinds of fields, the professionals they need to know, and I think Small Town, Alberta, rural Alberta, is right in the heart of a place where this type of facility would be most appropriate. The kind of integrated service delivery is important as people share expertise and as they share their love of children and work together for the children's benefit.

So far, Madam Speaker, we've achieved some real results. The work done on the fetal alcohol syndrome through dollars co-ordinated with Alberta Health and through Alberta Learning is already making its way to programs co-ordinated at the local level. The legislation on children involved in prostitution had very real support from the people not only in Justice but the people in the school systems and other people who are interested in saving children from abuse. That type of team support came from people within schools. The student health initiative, with over \$25 million that supports good health practices for the learner in participating classrooms, is another positive example. Children's mental health: the \$5 million that were put in earlier this year, I believe in July, were allocated to enhance access to children's mental health services across the province, and access is one of the critical factors that this motion will certainly provide.

This past October our first annual Alberta Children's Forum was held and chaired by Colleen Klein, and at that point, when people came together – children, families, and providers of services for children – many cited the need for one centre in their neighbourhood to help support the family and support the child and support the school.

This new Ministry of Children's Services will not operate in a silo. Through the Alberta children's initiative we'll be working with other departments and community groups, including schools. We will build on this most important community school example, and we will build on the intent of this motion. We are intent on working

hard to form connections with the school boards, municipal governments, and regional health authorities. We're intent on providing early intervention programs and support for families. The program that we started in 1994 with \$50 million from the Alberta government to fund grassroots preventive programs for children and youth is a beginning. This particular program would allow us to build on the positive and successful results and add to the early intervention and other complementary programs to help families and children develop skills before real risk and real trauma take place.

Madam Speaker, the children's initiative is one methodology of networking between government departments, but the most important network takes place between the parent, the child, and the school. We believe that there on site is an opportunity for that early intervention, for mediation for people with difficulties, for parenting courses, for protection against family violence by teaching, and for giving people the tools to operate in their own homes as well as in their communities and schools.

We believe that the Youth Secretariat, which will be very active this year in establishing linkages with youth, will help us enhance the opportunities for youth to face risk and avoid it. We're committed to working together with all our partnering ministries, and Madam Speaker, we do support the motion. The intent focuses on a committed, co-ordinated, consultative, and collaborative approach which really will make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, would like to enter the debate this afternoon on Motion 514, the delivery of children's services in schools, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Now, I've been listening to the debate this afternoon, and it certainly is an interesting proposal. When we consider that there is currently a duplication of services and infrastructure funding for services that are delivered to children, this motion may not be a bad idea. However, we have to be careful. With all the downloading that has gone on by this government, whether it be with municipalities or the education system, we have to be careful that an initiative like this does not fall into the laps of teachers, guidance counselors, principals, and other professionals in the school system, because they already have a workload that is very, very heavy. I know there are some people who will say that, oh, teachers are working 32 hours a week and they have every summer off, but this is just not true. And as outstanding as this idea is and as good an idea as I believe it is, this is one thing that we would have to be very, very careful about: not downloading any more programs and services to the already overworked teachers in this province.

I know there are going to be cost savings here, and I can think of many schools, both in the inner city and in the suburbs and in all areas of the province, where this sort of initiative would work, and it would prevent, with program delivery, children who are in need from falling through the cracks. We look at increases in the number of children who are going to school hungry. I know there are all kinds of statistics out there, and I can hear the argument on one side of the House, I can hear the argument on this side of the House, and I can hear the argument from that hon. member. But there are without question, Madam Speaker, children in this province going to school with empty stomachs. It is not time to lay blame for that situation. It is time to correct that. With the restructuring of the government and the confusion that has arisen out of this, this motion may be the answer.

I was astonished, Madam Speaker, the other day when the hon.

Member for Calgary-Buffalo stood up and asked a question to the minister responsible for FOIP. The Premier . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must now put all questions to conclude debate on the motion by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont under consideration.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 carried]

head: Government Motions

4:30 Adjournment of Session

23. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the Third Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm sure this will be carried unanimously also.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I was hoping it was still a debatable motion. It was a good thing the Justice minister read out the exact text of the motion because it strikes me that there are probably Albertans out there . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Not Justice.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, the revolving door moves so quickly that some of us dim-witted cousins from Calgary can't keep up. [interjection] The minister of economic development and tourism – that wasn't an invitation for the minister to respond.

MRS. BURGNER: It's Economic Development.

MR. DICKSON: Economic Development. Okay. Thanks, Calgary-Currie. I know the two of them are sort of a tag team at events I go to in Calgary. It's always another announcement. In fact, it's a lot more fun now, Madam Speaker, at these events in Calgary because we see a lot more of the esteemed elected representative from Calgary-Shaw, and every time I find his comments heartwarming and energizing. He just makes me realize again how much passion I have for this wonderful province.

Madam Speaker, a couple of points I want to make. The first one is that there may be some Albertans who'll look at this and think that really this decision is up to the Speaker in terms of when we're going to sit again. There are probably Albertans who don't understand when the wording says, "Adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council." Really what this means, to those Albertans that may otherwise think this is the Speaker's decision, is that this effectively is a decision by the cabinet. That makes us wonder what the criteria are that are used when government decides when to start a session and when to end it.

I expect that there are probably some Albertans that think the

decisions have to do with the number of issues of public importance, that maybe that would determine when the Legislature sat, how long it sat. Those people would be I think very sad, Madam Speaker, very disappointed to find out that the decision to turn the lights on or off in this famous place really has virtually nothing to do with the issues of importance to Albertans and everything to do with a government that likes to micromanage and assert its centralized control over the province. But they like to do that in the shadows, and all of the bright lights here seem to have an enormously intimidating impact on ministers. For some reason they would sooner do their work in their executive offices with their order in council machinery at their fingertips than to do it in this place.

I can understand why, Madam Speaker. Everybody doesn't have as much fun here as Calgary-Buffalo does, and a lot of people regard this as a tedious place, as a place where little real work gets done. I see the chorus of hands in the back row on the government side.

You know, what we do here is so darned important. And all kidding aside, what we have to ask is: why is it that the Legislature has not sat since May 18? Here we are; the government is looking to bring down the guillotine, if you will, and turn the lights off in the Assembly, and we're only a couple of days into it. We only started Wednesday. We sat Thursday, not Thursday evening. Here we are on Tuesday – we've barely gotten into the grist that's in front of us – and already the government is dusting off the escape hatch. They're looking for the fire escape, and we've barely turned up the heat, Madam Speaker.

The concern in terms of why we haven't sat since May 18. It clearly is not because there haven't been issues of importance to Albertans. By starting on November 17, what we understand the government is doing is using Christmas as sort of the other side of the vise-grips. So what you do is you in effect discourage legislators from raising the kinds of concerns in the kind of detail and the kind of specificity that they expect, and you count on opposition members getting anxious to get back and join their families and join their family Christmas preparations instead of staying here and doing the business of the people of Alberta.

Well, we have no control over when the Legislature comes back in, but I can signal to the government through your office, Madam Speaker, that there are grave and weighty matters on the agenda and that we're going to spend as much time and use as much vigour as we can muster to ensure that those issues are subjected to the kind of scrutiny, the kind of analysis that's required.

You know, it's of interest to me, if you look at the legislation that's in front of us, to what extent this reflects the priorities of Albertans. In the city of Calgary there is a huge housing crisis. A housing crisis. The single biggest issue that Albertans contact my office about is trying to find a safe, affordable place to live in downtown Calgary. This is a huge issue. It includes students. It includes seniors living in low-income households. Those people expect this body to start addressing some of those concerns. People expect this Chamber and the 83 men and women who are in this Chamber to start coming up with creative solutions to the problems those people have, and that's going to take some time to do.

I haven't seen anything in this very thin Order Paper, Madam Speaker, that's going to tell the people in Calgary-Buffalo how they're going to find safe, affordable accommodation. I've looked through it. It's not in any of the bills we've got on the Order Paper. But that's a real issue, and if some government minister is going to stand up and say that this problem is in hand, that it's all looked after, terrific.

But you know what I had a chance to do, Madam Speaker? When Claudette Bradshaw, the Minister of Labour at the federal level,

came to Calgary a number of months ago and met with the Member for Calgary-Bow and me, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Calgary Housing Authority, and Art Smith and a group of people, what I heard were lots of questions about what the federal government is going to do and not very much attention to what the government of Alberta can and ought to do. This a huge issue. We're elected as provincial legislators. We have the primary responsibility, not members of the House of Commons, to ensure that people have affordable accommodation. So far, because it's the government that controls the agenda, it's the government that determines what bills are brought forward and what motions are brought forward, other than for a little bit of time on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons. There's nothing that addresses that issue.

The whole business of student debt load. We've seen postsecondary students coming forward to raise serious and weighty concerns with respect to how unaffordable postsecondary education has become in the province of Alberta. The province that talks about a knowledge-based economy does probably the biggest disservice I can imagine to bright young people in this province. When I look at that graph that shows the Alberta spending on postsecondary education at the bottom of the list of Canadian provinces, I'm embarrassed. One might have thought that in the legislative program we would be asked to address that urgent issue and to address it with the kind of attention and urgency that the issue warrants.

That's not in this Order Paper either, Madam Speaker. It's not anywhere in here. We have a Learning minister who's reported to have said that a debt load of \$20,000 is okay. Well, we have some of our best and brightest young people who are leaving this province because they can't afford an education in the province of Alberta. They can go to the province of British Columbia for \$1,000 less tuition and get an excellent education. [interjections]

4:40

Madam Speaker, there are some people that would like to participate in a debate around that. Well, I'm sorry to disappoint the minister of energy; it's not in the Order Paper. It's not in the Order Paper, and if this Assembly wraps up soon, what we're going to find is that that's going to be another issue that doesn't get adequately addressed and adequately discussed here. You don't get answers in question period. One would hope that we'd see some legislative response. We'd like to see some policy document that stakes out the position of the government of Alberta in terms of low-income housing or low-income things.

Now, the Minister of Health and Wellness is trying to get my attention over there. He's got it, and I'm sure he's going to tell me that they did bring in a policy statement. Well, minister of health, through the Speaker, what we wanted was something that had some substance. To simply tease Albertans and tease legislators with some vague talk about contracting-out possibilities - when questions are put to the minister and the Premier, we don't get concrete responses, through the Speaker. You know, those are the kinds of issues that Albertans expect us to be talking about and not just in 50 minutes of question period. We should have a chance to engage in meaningful debate. We don't have that opportunity, Madam Speaker, because this government is more interested in turning off the lights. I see you, Madam Speaker. I'm not taking my eyes off you. They're more interested in turning off the lights here than getting this thing done.

Madam Speaker, we have an issue with access to health care services. Where in this agenda, where in this Order Paper do we find an opportunity to talk about the fact that significant studies in the Calgary health region and the Capital health region have

identified that we have a lot of new Canadians that can't access health care? I reference the report I tabled the other day and that the minister of health has now had time to look at. I want to give him an invitation right now, as soon as I sit down, to stand up and tell me in concrete, specific ways what things we're doing to ensure that those Canadians, new Canadians that don't have a strong command of English, are going to be able to give a meaningful, informed consent to a physician for treatment or diagnosis and how our health care professionals can adequately communicate with those new Canadians.

You know, in the city of Calgary we don't have the facilities. The Calgary regional health authority hasn't been able to do that job. The Department of Health and Wellness hasn't done that job. That's an issue that's hugely important. In Calgary, the third most attractive destination for new Canadians, those people are coming and too many of them are finding they can't access health care because of language problems. The Capital health region, frankly, has done a better job, Minister of Health and Wellness, through the chair, in dealing with that than the city of Calgary.

And I don't see any urgency there. I'm looking for the minister of health to be jumping out of his chair, pounding his desk with a response, a written response that he's going to table that's just going to exactly gut my argument and take away the legitimacy of my complaint. I don't see him doing that, Madam Speaker. As closely as I'm keeping an eye on you, my peripheral vision tells me that the Minister of Health and Wellness is not rising, not rising to quell this concern.

This isn't just my concern. There was a multicultural health forum at McDougall Centre. Now, this is richly ironic, Madam Speaker. McDougall Centre, Government House South – you know, we're just a matter of steps from the Premier's office. We're a matter of steps from the offices of the cabinet ministers when they're in Calgary. We have representatives of the multicultural organizations in Calgary . . .

DR. WEST: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

Point of Order Addressing the Chair

DR. WEST: Under Standing Order 23(h), I think it is, the hon. member consistently tries to interact in this Assembly by naming people across the way, by not speaking through the chair. The actual point of order is that he's directly talking to the minister of health, almost to get him into an inflamed debate here, making accusations directly to him. He should be speaking through the chair. Previously today we've noticed that this hon. member doesn't like some of the long-standing traditions of this House, and I think he should start honouring them now.

MR. DICKSON: On the point of order, Madam Speaker. For this member to suggest that a wily, seasoned veteran like the Minister of Health and Wellness would be baited by any comments made by this member in the course of this debate is outrageous and hardly warrants serious comment. I understand that that minister has been a longtime member of the House. I don't see him getting out of his chair. That's my complaint. That's my complaint, and if any member feels that they've been inflamed by anything that I've said, they will have their 20-minute opportunity to put that on the record and explain.

But this minister who raised the concern is attempting to use a point of order. It's an attempt . . . [Mr. Dickson's speaking time

expired] Well, thanks. I'd got some additional speaking time, I see, as a consequence of the intervention.

I think those are the points I wanted to make, Madam Speaker, on the point.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I really, really believe there truly isn't a point of order. The hon. member has from time to time said that he's making eye contact with the Speaker, which is fine, but I would ask that you do in fact go through the Speaker.

I will actually give the Minister of Health and Wellness credit that's due him. He's never provoked to where he will get up and try to debate when somebody tries to provoke him. He is one of the exceptional members of this Assembly for staying calm, cool, and collected, and I think, hon. member, that's probably what you were really trying to say. Right?

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, you say it so much more eloquently than this member could.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: I was just going to make this final observation. In Cairo there's an old government palace, an old government building, and what's happened is that they simply decided they weren't going to deal with legislation in this building. So what happened is that people moved into this building. They set up residence because it's tough to find a place to live in a city of 18 million people. So what happens is that in this place that used to be a legislative chamber, the homeless people moved in, and they set up kind of a tent city right where legislators used to sit. It occurs to me, Madam Speaker, that if we're not going to sit as a Legislature and debate the issues that are important to Albertans, for the 10 months or nine months out of the year when this place is inactive, maybe what we ought to do is make this a shelter and a place of sanctuary. People who can't find a place to live would find a place to live in the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll look at you all the time when I speak to this motion. I promise that.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I, too, will look at you.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the kind observation that you just made.

Madam Speaker, when I look at this motion, I ask myself: how long have we been sitting? I guess today is the fourth day; is it? Would you confirm that for me? It's the fourth day. We've been in this Chamber for exactly four days, and already I find before us a motion to adjourn whenever the government of this province wants us to adjourn.

It's a commentary, an important commentary, on the way this Chamber is treated in this province by the government in power. We are being reduced to being redundant. You're not needed except to rubber-stamp. This to me is a serious concern, and Albertans express those concerns, my constituents express those concerns to me day in and day out. They say, "Are you sitting?" I say: "No. We'll be sitting on the 17th." "Oh, I thought you had been sitting for a month, two months. What do you guys do when you're not sitting?" It's a good question. I think that's a question that should

be asked again and again and again in this Legislature. I tell them, Madam Speaker, that we are locked out. I said: as an opposition member I have no say in how many days this Chamber will do its business in the presence of all 83 or whatever number of us are present. So I said that I face what I can only call a lockout.

4:50

My right to sit in this Chamber and to represent my constituents is eroded due to the time that we are not sitting here, so I want to speak to this motion seriously. If this Assembly is to be effective, it needs to sit here much longer than we are permitted at the present to do.

This morning, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of a university student organization called CAUS, Council of Alberta University Students. They wanted to meet with me. They had apparently met with another group prior to coming to my office. They were supposed to be there at 9:30, but they didn't get there till a quarter to 10. I gave them as much time as they needed, but they didn't get all the time they needed at the other place. What they came to talk to me about was their concern about rising tuition fees and that universities and colleges are being put beyond the reach of most postsecondary students and their families by these ever increasing tuition fees.

I talked to them. I said, "Well, look; the government of this province apparently was able to talk to your predecessors two years ago, to talk you into accepting the 30 percent limit on their tuition fees." They said: "That was a mistake. That was wrong. We are here to tell you that that 30 percent ceiling is not acceptable to us, and we want you to represent that position of ours in this House." At this point I told them: "Look; we are here at the pleasure of this government that imposes a 30 percent operating cost and tuition fee on you, and I agree with you that tuition fees are increasing. I agree with you that this decision of the government, this particular act of the government has made education unaffordable for average Alberta families. It is true that you are being burdened increasingly with debts, but I am afraid that I may not have a chance in this sitting of the Assembly to plead your case to the government and to the new Minister of Learning."

They were desperate. They were saying: "You must find time. Ask your colleagues in the Assembly to find time to address this issue. We are in the first early stages of seeing the government make decisions about the next budget, and we want to hear some news from this government. That good news will not come unless people like you have the opportunity, extended opportunity and protracted opportunity, to sit in this Legislature and day after day after day call upon this government to freeze tuition fees and begin to roll these tuition fees back." That's one issue, Madam Speaker, that requires the attention of the Assembly and requires its attention now, in this sitting.

Madam Speaker, again speaking to this motion, the other issue that the government of this province has defined as a most important issue for Albertans is their intention to legalize private, for-profit hospitals. The Premier of this province on the eve of the opening of this sitting went to the people of Alberta on a private TV station, spending \$11,000 of their money and my money and your money, to tell them how important it is for him to start this debate, on his desire and intention and determination to undermine the publicly funded health care system and to allow, to legalize private, for-profit hospitals in this province in order, in his view, to address the pain and suffering of the people of Alberta. How nice of the Premier to begin thinking about the pain and suffering of the people of Alberta. How nice of him to say, "What are we going to do about the long

waiting lines?" that he himself should be given the credit for having created in this province.

[The Speaker in the chair]

While he defined the issue to be so important that he wanted to go to the people of Alberta directly, he doesn't want that matter to be addressed here at any length. So the motion before us – let's give his cabinet the authority today to bring this sitting to a close as and when it wishes.

When this sitting was about to start, I had heard through some informal sources and channels that the government wanted us to sit for no more than two weeks. I asked the question: two weeks? Eight days? [interjections] I know there are people among my colleagues here who are very uncomfortable sitting here, and when they hear "two weeks," they applaud. They should go back to their constituents and ask them how long they want them to sit here.

I can report to you, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents want this Assembly to sit much longer. They want me to be here speaking on their behalf and carrying their concerns from the street over into this Chamber. They are very concerned about the future of the health care system as we know it today. They want this Assembly to be in session, and they want this Assembly to debate formally, have an emergency debate on this very, very urgent issue of the future of public health care. We cannot have that time to debate this so very important issue, so important that the minister of health has issued a policy statement, the Premier has gone to the public to plead for how we can save his view of how the system should work. Then we are denied in this Chamber the ability, the time, the opportunity to debate that issue and have the people of Alberta watch us debate that issue and get their input from outside and bring it to us so that the government is advised of what the people of Alberta think about this proposal to dismantle a publicly funded health care system that has worked for us well but has been thrown into a crisis over the last seven years precisely because of the policies of this government.

I can't believe that on the fourth sitting day of this session we should have this motion come before us. This is ludicrous, Mr. Speaker. It really puts into question the seriousness with which this government treats the elected MLAs from all across this province, who are supposed to sit in this House and deliberate over matters that are of great concern and grave concern to most Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I really want to know why, before the sitting resumed, the government didn't say: look; we are going to meet for eight days, and that's going to be it. Then they can be held accountable by the people of Alberta. Why come here giving a certain impression that we are here, you know, until the business is finished and then turn around within four days and say, "Well, now we need the authority to close the sitting as soon as we can"? We have some important bills before us. We know that given the intention that's expressed in this motion by this government now to close the sitting as soon as possible, they will try to rush these bills through without due debate and consideration of this Assembly. I fear I cannot support this motion because it will deny Albertans the opportunity to have their MLAs have enough time to debate these very important bills and very important issues, only some of which have been touched on in my remarks.

5:00

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I close and say and appeal to the Premier, appeal to the government side not to bring this sitting to a close prematurely, to commit today that they'll sit here until Christmas Day, if necessary, so long as those bills that are before us,

that were brought before us by the House, are dealt with and dealt with adequately and dealt with at length.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

head: Introduction of Guests
(*reversion*)

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly a gentleman who has been sitting keenly listening to the debate this afternoon in the public gallery. This gentleman has been very active in bringing forward the issue of the Workers' Compensation Board and how many cases are falling through the cracks. I would ask Mr. Tony Locke to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly. I would like on behalf of all Albertans to thank him for his work in bringing forward the issue that we need to address in this Assembly, and that's a public inquiry into the WCB.

head: Government Motions
(*continued*)

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and speak to Government Motion 23, which is asking already, after four short days, for this Assembly to stand adjourned at some time to be named very soon.

AN HON. MEMBER: When?

MS CARLSON: Too soon for us, that's for sure, Mr. Speaker. We see with the lack of respect that this government has for this Assembly and the variety of functions that this Assembly should be performing on behalf of the people of this province that it's certainly too soon for us. Clearly not soon enough for them when they're talking about applauding the closing down of this session after perhaps even a mere short two weeks of time, really only eight days of sitting.

It is with grave concern that I speak against this motion, not only on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie but on behalf of all of the people in this province who have expected year after year for this government to live up to its promise of being open and accountable. Yet it hasn't. In fact, what they do show is a huge disrespect for the process of being open or accountable.

Part of being open and accountable is being here in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, being open to questions that are brought forward from people throughout the province in terms of their concerns about issues that are arising out of the decision-making process of this government, open to full disclosure and open debate on the variety of bills and motions and other business that occurs in this Assembly on a daily basis when we sit, all of which cannot happen when we get squeezed into these very, very short time lines.

It was May 18 the last time that we were in this Legislature. That's a long time ago, Mr. Speaker. There have been many, many

issues of concern throughout this province since that time period. There are innumerable education issues, environmental issues, issues about the roads, the downloading to municipal governments, the homeless, safe communities, and of course the bill that I was actively involved with last spring, Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act.

All of these issues deserve extensive debate in this Assembly. The people of the province deserve their voices to be heard on these issues, and the government's actions deserve to be scrutinized more than anything else, Mr. Speaker, because in many cases they have acted, I would state, against the wishes of many Albertans. It's our role as the watchdog, as the Official Opposition in this province, to report back to those people what's happening with the government actions.

This is our best way in which to do that and to provide a forum for those Albertans who are concerned to express their concerns, Mr. Speaker. When we're talking about eight measly days of question period, we can't even barely scratch the surface on the issues. So far, all we've had time to talk about in the four days we've been here are health care issues, surely the most important issue in this province at this time but not the only issue.

We've got 16 more departments to go, and we're not finished in health care. By starting us back in this Assembly on November 17, that leaves us barely six and a half weeks to the end of the year, and this government will never sit over the Christmas time period, so it's really only a maximum potential. Well, you know, Christmas Day I'm happy to be here, because I think that it's more important to be here discussing the issues of the province than it is to be anywhere else.

DR. TAYLOR: I'd rather be with my family on Christmas Day.

MS CARLSON: Listen to the feedback I'm getting, Mr. Speaker. These guys can't believe it, because they have no respect for this Assembly and no respect for the work that goes on in here and how important it is. They just want to go along their merry little way, make all their decisions behind closed doors, and get out of here as fast as they can. But, in fact, that does not serve the people of this province, and there is absolutely no way . . . [interjections] I hear the moans and groans from the government members, but it does not serve the people of this province to condense this legislative sitting time period into such a short time frame.

Of course that's why they didn't call us back in September or October or at the beginning of November to discuss all these bills that we have available to discuss this fall. They push it back to November 17, and that's when they call us in because they know that they're going to be out of here in another couple of weeks at the outside. If we're lucky, we're going to get another two weeks in here, Mr. Speaker, and it just simply isn't good enough.

Let's think about what happened in September, October, and November. Was there anything monumental happening then that would have precluded us from coming back here in the Assembly at that time? Well, I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that there was no good reason for us not to come back. For a little while the government was talking about the work they had to do on Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, that they wanted to have that all spruced up and ready to come back here in the fall sitting, but in fact the bill is so flawed that they have to completely redraft it and bring it back under a new heading in the spring session. So that wasn't even a good reason for us to prolong the time period in terms of when we could have come back in here.

So clearly, if that one's not being brought back until the spring, what other issues were out there that could have been good reasons

for us not to be in this Assembly? Mr. Speaker, I challenge any of these members to tell us what those reasons are, because we don't see them. The people of the province don't see them. But what we do see is that there were ample good reasons for us to come back in sooner.

When we take a look at the bills that we've got at second reading now, these bills deserve scrutiny by the people of this province. How does that scrutiny happen? We come in here and we start to talk about them. We report back to the people in the province in terms of the progress that's made on them and the debate that happens back and forth, the pros and cons of the issues, and put them out there for public consumption, for the people in the province, for the voters in this province, and for everyone who lives here to take a look at what's being talked about in this Legislature and to give them time to make up their minds on the issues, to give them time to prepare their feedback so they can give it to us so that we can present it to the government. They can also present it to their own government members, if they happen to live in a government constituency, so that the bills can be improved, so that this province could bring in the best possible legislation for the people of this province.

That takes time, Mr. Speaker. It takes some time for people to analyze, to understand what's going on, to analyze it and to bring their feedback on the issues, and we've got some very important bills under discussion.

Bill 38, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, is going to, if it passes in this Legislature, change the nature of minority rights in this province forever, Mr. Speaker, not for a short time but for a very long time. That really deserves huge scrutiny. We need to give people time to give their feedback on this issue. Why isn't the government doing that? Because they're afraid of what that feedback is going to be. They don't want to hear from people. They just want to march down the road to the drums that they've set their pace to, and they don't care what anybody says, what anybody else does, or about the feedback. They just want to get there as fast as they can, get it over with, and not have to listen to feedback from the people. They don't want to be under scrutiny. They don't want us to be able to do our job, which is to be the watchdog, to watch what they're doing, to report back to the people, oppose what is wrong – which is lots with this government – and an opportunity to propose alternatives.

5:10

We're happy to do our job, Mr. Speaker. We like to be able to do our job in a full and open fashion so that all people in this province can see what this government is doing. But this government runs scared. They don't want to be scrutinized. They don't want people to be able to discuss or to talk about the kind of legislation that's coming forward in this House.

The Health Information Act: probably the most important bill that we've seen in this Legislature for a couple of years. Look what's happened. We barely, barely scratched the surface on discussion there, and they're going to try to squish it through. I'm sure we'll be facing closure at the end of the day on this bill so that they can get it passed before the break.

The Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act. Boy, if a government ever needed to be responsible in terms of how they did their budgeting, it's these guys. They bring in these budgets that have no resemblance to reality, that are completely out of whack with any realistic projections, and then have to keep bringing in changes to them periodically through the year. Certainly they don't know how to be responsible in that regard, and that deserves scrutiny and a lot of scrutiny.

Insurance Statutes Amendment Act. That one should go through fairly quickly, Mr. Speaker, but once again, we have to ensure that we give the people of the province adequate time for feedback.

Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. This is a classic example of what happens when this government squeezes bills through. Bill 7 is in third reading, and look what happened. They rushed so quickly through first and second readings and committee of this bill that the doctors, who are the most directly affected by this bill, didn't have time to adequately review what was going on here. Now we know what they're saying. They've taken out big ads in all of the papers throughout this province opposing this particular bill and asking people to give their feedback to the government. And look what's happened. It's in third reading already. The time for most of the debate has passed already because this government tries to ram through legislation to serve their own purposes and not the purposes of the people of this province. That's wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Every single time they bring in a government motion like this, four days after we started the sitting, which is an absolute insult to the process, then we're going to stand up here and we're going to take as much time as we want to complain about the process, because it's wrong. It does not serve the people of this province, and Bill 7 is a classic example of that.

If we take a look at the rest of the information that's on this Order Paper that we have here today, we've lots of written questions that for some reason the government is afraid to answer. There are about 20 or 30 of them – oh, more than that – maybe 40 questions on the Order Paper here that deserve answers. Are we going to get them before the close of this session, Mr. Speaker? I don't think so. We might get a couple of them.

I've got a few questions under Written Questions myself that I'm still waiting for answers to from the government. We don't just pick these questions out of thin air, Mr. Speaker. These questions come to us because someone in the province or large groups of people in the province have brought forward concerns. They want answers. We know that we can't always ask these questions in question period because we just don't have enough sitting time, so one of the other options available to us is to submit them to the government in a written question format and hope – hope – that the government is going to decide to answer them.

I've got Written Question 237 still standing on the Order Paper and another one, 254. I don't think they're going to get answered, Mr. Speaker. Certainly Written Question 254 is so far down the list that I'm going to have to bring it back again in the spring. This government is always complaining about the expense of this Assembly. Imagine the additional, unnecessary expense that is brought forward when we talk about having to resubmit these questions: they have to go by the table officers again; they have to be reprinted; they have to go through the process of scrutiny again. All of those are totally unnecessary costs. Now, that could be completely averted if we had a decent length of time to be able to discuss the issues in this Legislative Assembly, but we don't because the government really doesn't care about what people have to say in this province. They just want to do their own thing.

Motions for returns: the same thing, lots of them, and once again very interesting points to be brought forward here. I have Motion for a Return 248. We're only on Motion for a Return 221. The speed that these things generally go through this Assembly means that I'll have to bring it back in the spring as well as Motion for a zReturn 253, both of which are very good questions that we expect answers to, and we're not going to get them in this Assembly. So, Mr. Speaker, once again I see that as a real problem.

Then let's talk a about motions other than government motions.

There are pages of them on the Order Paper that won't be discussed, and some of them are critical issues, Mr. Speaker. I would say that some of them are time-sensitive, critical issues.

Let's take a look at Motion 522, which the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has on the Order Paper, which is talking about increased "funding for long-term care to provide better access and to ensure that individuals are able to remain in their home communities when they require long-term care." Well, this should be a motion that's important to every MLA in this House, not just opposition members. For sure, every rural MLA in this Assembly has got that concern in their home riding. I know they do, because I've talked to a lot of the people in that area whose prime concern as they age is that they are not going to be able to remain in their home community because they are not going to be able to get adequate home care.

Well, as you age and you see things changing in your environment, the one thing that you really like to be able to maintain is residency of your choice. If you've been born and raised in a particular community, then that's where you want to stay as long as you can, Mr. Speaker. This government is denying people that ability by not providing adequate long-term care. That's an issue that should be on the floor of this Assembly so that people from throughout this province have an opportunity to respond to it. It's not going to happen this session.

Well, you can believe for sure that it's a pretty important issue, and we'll be bringing it back again in the spring. It's once more an indication of how unresponsive this government is to the needs and concerns of people who have lived their whole lives in this province and who have made substantial contributions over their lifetime.

Another excellent motion for a return is on the Order Paper under the name of my colleague from Lethbridge-East. This is once again a motion that should be of particular concern to MLAs in this Assembly who have rural components to their ridings. Here it talks about revising "the Farm Income Disaster Program so that it helps all farmers whose operations are viable in the long term, but who are experiencing short-term disaster." We see that that's a huge issue in all of western Canada at this particular point in time, certainly an issue that deserves recognition by this House and certainly an issue that this government should try to resolve. They have it within their abilities to resolve it, but they are just putting their heads in the sand and not dealing with the issue.

We want that issue on the floor of this Assembly so the people can hear all sides of the argument, so that we can have some feedback from people across this province who are impacted by this, and so that we come to some sort of decision that empowers those people and helps them. They're always telling us that they take the concerns of people who live in rural communities seriously. Well, let them put their money where their mouth is, Mr. Speaker. Let us debate it. They've got to walk the talk. They just can't talk the talk. It just doesn't work that way. People ultimately will see through that and will be very upset with it.

An issue that we've all heard lots of recently from various municipalities throughout the province is Motion 541, standing under the name of my colleague from Edmonton-Manning, that talks about urging "the Government to establish a stable and predictable funding framework for Alberta municipalities." We're seeing crisis after crisis throughout the municipalities in this province because this government is deliberately underfunding them. It's an issue that they want addressed, and it's an issue that we think should be addressed too. No doubt, many municipalities are in crisis mode at this time and have had to significantly cut back on frontline expenses and on roadway improvements and building because of the down-

loading by this provincial government. That's a huge issue. We're talking about huge dollars. It deserves that kind of recognition in this Assembly so that it can be debated and municipalities and individuals have a chance to bring forward their concerns.

5:20

Once again this is Motion 541. It's so far down the list that clearly it won't get discussed this session. Be assured, Mr. Speaker, that we will be bringing this issue back up in the springtime, because it's not going to go away. You can't continue to ignore both hard and soft infrastructure in this province without ultimately paying a huge price and without ultimately municipalities belling the cat. The cat in this instance is this government, who has been licking their chops in terms of keeping all the money for themselves and doling out very few funds for projects that are very important, both soft and hard infrastructure projects that are very important in this province.

The very backbone of their support in past years will clearly crumble if they continue on in this fashion, because municipalities can't survive, and they don't need onetime funding as we have seen the little spot funding coming through the government. They need a sustainable program, Mr. Speaker. They need a program that will ensure that they can make the same kinds of rolling budget commitments as this provincial government likes to do. There's no doubt that the business plans at the municipal level need to be made on a three- to five-year basis the same as they are at the provincial level, but they can't do it because they haven't got the moneys to project that far ahead.

That's why the bill that I introduced today, Mr. Speaker, is a very important bill to be brought forward and discussed. We talk about a fiscal stabilization plan which would build up the kind of stabilization fund that would allow that kind of three-year or five-year commitment to be made to municipalities so that they can properly do their budget, so they can just properly do their job, and so that they have some security in terms of the kinds of soft and hard infrastructure that they can provide down the road. Right now this government budgets on a wish and a promise at best, and we've seen the consequences of that. It's budgets that are inaccurate, that should be changed and brought in and adjusted throughout the year but is impossible to have.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to say a few words about Motion 23 this afternoon. I'm astonished like other hon. members are that four days into this fall session we're talking about ending the legislative session, the Third Session.

Now, I have a lot of issues, as do all hon. members of the Assembly, that I would certainly like to see debated. The first one that comes to mind, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of health care, and the best place to deal with this issue is right here in the Assembly. Many, many people were very anxious. They were grateful that when the announcement came that we were going to have to look at provisions to allow the regional health authorities to contract out health provision or health providing services that – well, people heard this, and they were relieved that the session was just about ready to start, because they knew that the hard questions could be asked.

I know that constituents of mine in the Edmonton-Gold Bar area know what response they will get from the government. We need to have a long debate on this issue. This issue galvanizes the public. Sure there are some that are looking at the facts, and they're convinced that this is the way we should deliver health services in

future. But the majority of people in this province do not agree with their elected government on this issue. The majority of people feel that all health care providers should be through the public system.

Now, as I understand it, there is over \$660 million of the total health care budget that is through the regional health authorities, and by through the regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, I mean that it is paid to people to provide a service or services to citizens of this province who are ill or need care. There are no provisions to mark the accountability issue. The Auditor General brings this up. The Auditor General is very concerned about the sum of money, the sum of taxpayers' dollars that are being given to these private, for-profit health care providers. He outlined it in his latest report this past September.

This trend has increased, and it has increased in some areas of the province more than others. That is also very interesting. When the health care debate started on the issue of private, for-profit hospitals, of course the first place was, I believe, just up the street here at 107th Street and 100th Avenue. There was talk that maybe this was a good location for a private hospital. Then the whole issue drifted south. We stopped in Devon for a while, then we went over to

Leduc, and I believe we even went over toward Forestburg, toward Galahad. Then we went to Calgary with the issue, and that's where we remain at this moment. The city of Calgary and its hospital situation is so different from this city, Mr. Speaker.

Why would we be in any hurry to leave this Legislative Assembly? The hon. Member for Redwater worked very hard to provide Albertans with a report on long-term care. The Auditor General mentions this. The Auditor General mentions the fact that there is a need for long-term care beds. Now, we could take some of the excess capacity that is maybe in Edmonton and turn it into long-term care beds. I understand that we have a 10-year supply. If there wasn't to be a pile driven or a brick laid in this city, we still have a 10-year supply or a surplus of hospital beds. But in Calgary – well, we all know that the Calgary General fell down; it imploded. We see the Edmonton General and the use that it has.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Assembly stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

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

