

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 14, 2003** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 2003/05/14
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen. Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the great pleasure today of introducing the Hon. Tony Whitford, Speaker of the Northwest Territories, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Speaker Whitford was first elected in a by-election in 1988 and again in the general election of 1991, representing the Yellowknife South constituency. He was elected in the general election of 1999 to represent the constituency of Kam Lake and was elected as Speaker on January 17, 2000, for the 14th Legislature. Mr. Whitford is a graduate of the University of Calgary and does have a southern home in Cochrane, Alberta. I'd ask all members to join with me in welcoming the hon. Speaker Whitford to our Legislature.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise to introduce to you and through you some special guests in our gallery today. As you know, this is Crime Prevention Week, a time when many individuals and organizations are working hard to increase awareness of what all of us can do to make our communities stronger and safer. Last Friday I had the privilege of hosting the 12th annual crime prevention awards, which recognized 14 groups and individuals who have put their hearts and souls into preventing crime in their communities. In the members' gallery we have some of the award recipients, and they are: Kayla Pentelulik, Drumheller Students Against Drinking and Driving; Adrienne Yellowdirt, Yellowhead Tribal Community Corrections Society; John Fuga, Strathcona County Crime Watch; Nick Semeniuk, Stony Plain Crime Prevention volunteer; Shannon Ross Watson, Inglewood prostitution reduction project; and a group recipient named Chicks in Charge, which is a group from Morinville that informs teens about sexual assault and dating violence. Two members of the Chicks in Charge are with us today – Solange Rivet and Megan Thiel, who is here with her father, Ed Thiel – and the group's sponsor, Melonie Dziwenka. Congratulations to all of you. Would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce a group of students with their parents from Duchess, Alberta. They are led by teacher Mrs. Joyce Evans with parent helpers Brenda Watt, George Berg, Sherri Neely, Jodi Bradford, Sherry Charlton, Alyce Wickert, Marlene Robinson, Danette Plumer, and Tracey Palaschak. There are 26 students with them, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a rare event that in one week I get to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly some really great visitors and guests. Specifically, with us today are 50 excited students from Roland Michener secondary school in Slave Lake. They're joined by their teacher, who is one of the greatest teachers I know, Tracey Crain, and parent helpers Susan Moore, Teresa Sinclair, Teresa Bath, and Elaine Ulm. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Mrs. Gordon: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 50 students from Erskine school, located in my constituency. They are here today to see the Legislature and to sit in on question period and are accompanied by teachers Hank Boer and Sharon Fischer. The students are very enthusiastic, and it was good visiting with them. They're seated in both galleries. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two of Edmonton's really exciting theatre artists. My friend Chris Craddock is an award-winning playwright and actor and the artistic director for Azimuth Theatre and the playwright for the hit show *Boy Groove*, which is being held over at Azimuth Theatre until May 25. With Chris is Aaron Macri, the composer for *Boy Groove* and a cofounder of Ribbit Productions, which is the cosponsor for the play. They're both seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly a very distinguished guest, Dr. Kay McFadyen, who volunteers in our legislative offices over at the Annex on a regular basis. Dr. McFadyen has a background in education policy and has taught over the years at the University of Alberta. We are pleased to have her volunteer with us, and I'm grateful that she offers her assistance to us on a regular basis. I would now ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two wonderful and capable individuals who are presently working in my constituency office. My first guest, Mary MacKinnon, is a registered social worker who is working in my office during the spring session. Mary is doing a terrific job at the Edmonton-Highlands office taking care of the casework and generally running the office in a very capable way. My second guest, Meghan McMaster, will be going into her second year in the Grant MacEwan music program, and she is the STEP student at the Edmonton-Highlands constituency office this summer. So I'd ask both Meghan and Mary to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

I have a second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly members of Edmonton's deaf community and members of Edmonton's interpreting community. They're here today because they're very concerned about the closure of the American sign language interpreter program at Grant MacEwan Community College, which is the most highly recognized interpreter training program in Canada. The loss of this program will have devastating effects on the deaf community. The accessibility of Alberta's deaf community is at stake. I would ask, as I read their names, that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Helen McLeod, Tracy Hetman, Linda Hollewa, Carl Pickett, Caroline Fritz, Susan Madill, Erin Madill, Janice Keller, Grant Underschultz, Terry Williams, Lori Strelzyck, Angela Stratiy . . .

An Hon. Member: Slow down. She can't sign that fast.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Sorry. . . . Donna Korpiniski, Leanne Walls, Geoff Chiasson. Geoff is here from B.C. to express his concern. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Education Funding

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, the government is saying, "Don't panic," but cuts in education that Edmonton public school board was forced to make yesterday will have a real impact on the lives of 450 teaching professionals and thousands of students. One student, Haley Grundy, told the Official Opposition that this school year she has been in classrooms with more students than desks and she expects the situation to get worse next year when her school cuts 10 teachers. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that his government's policy is directly hurting students in this province?

1:40

Mr. Klein: No, I won't admit such a thing. Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, the goals and the objectives of the government are to make sure that Alberta students are getting the best education possible and, at the same time, make sure that taxpayers are getting the best value for their dollars in the school system – that's very important – and through the Commission on Learning and the recommendations that will be forthcoming, to ensure that the system remains sustainable for the future.

Now, relative to the assertion in the preamble, Mr. Speaker, where the student claims that there are more students than desks, I will have the hon. Minister of Learning investigate that particular situation.

Dr. Nicol: Again to the Premier: how will the Premier's idea of wage rollbacks encourage those young teachers who are planning to leave this province to stay and become teachers in our province?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is what comes about when the opposition gets all their information from headlines, not the story but the headlines. I understand that the headline in the *Edmonton Journal* today read, "Cut wages to save jobs." I read through the story, and I read through the story, and I read through the story. Finally, I got down to the 11th paragraph, and when you reach that paragraph, what you find is that I was accurately quoted: the Premier "acknowledged wage rollbacks or tinkering with pension rules might be something the ATA could consider." Underline "might." The idea is that if the ATA wanted to look at these options, we wouldn't

object. Now, that's not saying that the Premier is suggesting wage rollbacks. Not at all.

I don't know if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition got down to the 11th paragraph. I suspect that he and his researchers read nothing more than the headlines, and that's unfortunate.

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, I was at his press conference yesterday.

Why has the Premier suggested that teachers alone should take wage rollbacks to solve the schools' financial problems when public schools are the responsibility of all Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Indeed, public schools are the responsibility of all Albertans. That's why we have a Minister of Learning to represent education throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what point the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is trying to make. Perhaps the Minister of Learning . . .

Ms Blakeman: Why do teachers have to bear the brunt?

The Speaker: Please. Please.

Mr. Klein: Well, now, someone over there, a mouth, asked the question. The teachers don't have to bear the brunt, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Learning is fully committed to working with the Edmonton public school board to find out what can be done to overcome some of their budget problems.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Transmission Policy

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year a stakeholder coalition for the economic transmission policy, which included Enmax Energy, Fording Coal, and Calpine Canada plus six consumer organizations such as the Industrial Power Consumers & Cogenerators Association, whose members use 50 percent of Alberta's electricity, warned that consumers should pay only for transmission that is for reliability or that will lead to lower overall costs. Instead, this government has stuck consumers with an additional \$4 billion in transmission costs over the next 10 years. To the Premier: why did this government not encourage investment in generation in southern Alberta, which could have made transmission upgrades unnecessary, saving up to \$2.5 billion instead of adding \$2.5 billion to already . . .

The Speaker: Hon. the Premier, there was a question.

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, yesterday it was \$2.5 billion; today it's \$4 billion. This simply goes to prove how inconsistent and how uninformed the Liberals actually are on this matter.

When they talk about electricity generation in southern Alberta, perhaps they don't get down to southern Alberta outside of the hon. leader of the Liberal Party, because he lives there and represents a constituency in Lethbridge, but all one needs to do is go to the Pincher Creek area and to see the literally more than 100, perhaps up to 200 windmills in operation on Cowley Ridge and other areas to see that indeed electricity is being generated. Some of that electricity was indeed subsidized under the small power producers' program when we had it in place. So we're doing our part to make sure that alternate forms of electricity come onstream.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure

recently announced that the Alberta government was going to purchase about 90 percent of our energy electricity requirements from so-called green power, which would include biomass, cogen, and wind.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why did the government choose to ignore the advice of the stakeholder coalition when they appeared before the standing policy committee in February of last year and told this government that, quote, they should not pick winners and losers by having consumers pay for transmission that is unlikely to lower overall costs, end of quote?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't at the standing policy committee meeting in question, and I don't know if the hon. member was, but I'm sure the Minister of Energy was at that particular meeting and perhaps can provide an answer.

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've done exactly what the member suggests. We've reacted to the Premier's council on electrical issues. We've reacted to extensive stakeholder input. We've reacted to bringing a commitment to bring the lowest possible power generation prices to Albertans that we can.

Mr. Speaker, if the member in his spare time would choose to check the web site of the Alberta Department of Energy, under the Premier's council on electrical issues he'll see a statement on transmission that says: "Develop a comprehensive policy on transmission that will encourage transmission and generation to compete for the overall lowest cost." That's what the policy does. In fact, if you look at this policy today, which is the same policy as it was six months ago, that transmission has delivered 3,000 megawatts of new generation at a savings – a savings – to the Alberta rate base of some 5 billion to 6 billion Canadian dollars.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: what programs is this government considering putting in place to help consumers pay their power bills once transmission costs have increased by as much as 250 percent because of your electricity deregulation policies?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is a ridiculous, unwarranted, unfounded, stupid assumption, and I'm not going to answer it.

Private/Public Partnerships

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, the secret draft report from the government's P3 subcommittee on schools has verified what the Official Opposition has been saying for months: this government has no justification for P3s, no objectives, no plans, and no policy. Further, the report states that this government plans to sell or lease municipal reserve lands to fund school construction. To the Premier: how does this government plan to use reserve school lands to pay for school construction when those are municipal lands?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of things that would have to be worked out between school boards and municipalities, depending on the ownership of the lands.

Mr. Speaker, speaking to the concept of public/private partnerships or alternative forms of financing public works projects, there is indeed a plan, notwithstanding what the hon. member stated in his

preamble. The plan is to have a proper adjudication of those projects that might – underline "might" – be candidates for alternative financing proposals. This adjudication committee is just now getting up and running, and if there are ideas for a P3 project that could involve inner-city schools – and it could. I use this as an example, and I use it as a "might," and I underline: could, maybe, might. Not that it's going to happen, perhaps, but an example would be an inner-city school site in Calgary or Edmonton – we'll use either one of those cities – where there's tremendous value attached to the land, where the school is totally underutilized, where there is some thought about maybe closing the school but where perhaps there is a need for, say, K to 3.

To redevelop that same site, if there are some historical components that need to be preserved, a portion of the land could still be set aside for public reserve, but the other part of the land could be redeveloped into commercial, residential, and/or public-sector uses. This in turn could generate money for the school boards, could accommodate educational and community requirements and at the same time provide much-needed housing in an inner-city area. So, Mr. Speaker, if it makes sense, then the adjudication committee will make that judgment and make recommendations to the government.

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. These are municipal lands. Shouldn't the municipalities get the revenue, not the province?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is an assumption. There is a mixed ownership, as I understand it, of school board lands. In some cases the province owns the land, in some cases the school board, and in some cases the municipality. So all of these things would have to be figured out and determined, and there would have to be concurrence on the part of the school board and the municipality before any of these projects would proceed.

Mr. Bonner: To the Premier: why were P3 policies, processes, objectives, and frameworks not developed before the government committed the province to this P3 debacle?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, what we have committed ourselves to is the principle of pursuing financing alternatives, one of which is the public/private partnership concept. Outside of the Calgary courthouse, none are under consideration yet by the committee, which was just established and I think confirmed by cabinet on Tuesday, yesterday, as a matter of fact. So there's hardly been time for this committee to get up and running, never mind considering projects. There are no projects before the committee at this particular time, at least as far as I know.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Education Funding

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his desperation to escape the blame for the school crisis, the Premier is casting about for scapegoats. He blames school boards. He blames parents. He blames teachers. He blames the big bad feds. Well, the buck stops with the Premier. It is about time that he started showing some responsible leadership. My question to the Premier: why is the Premier pointing fingers and pinning the blame on school boards and teachers when his government is entirely to blame for the crisis in our schools?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there are so many false assumptions and statements in the preamble that I don't even know where to start. I haven't blamed anyone. I haven't pointed fingers at anyone. There is no crisis in education, none whatsoever. Of course, it's natural for the ND opposition to blame the government. What they will say is that the government should simply throw more money at the situation. The NDs, you know, dream in greenbacks. They see this money just falling from the sky, and they just say: lookit; gather it up in wheelbarrows and just throw it at school boards and throw it at health and throw it at municipalities. It doesn't matter where it comes from. If it comes from banks, well, that's okay with the NDs. You know, the more you borrow the better. The more you go into deficit, the more you go into debt, the more you hamstring the future citizens of this province, the young people of this province, the more they like it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these cuts and layoffs are being announced by school board after school board across this province, is the Premier suggesting that there's a conspiracy between school boards to make him and his government look bad?

Mr. Klein: No. Not at all. Mr. Speaker, we really want to work with school boards, and we want to work with the ATA – I indicated that in my scrum yesterday – to achieve sustainability. We want to work with parents. We want to work with students. That's why we have established the Commission on Learning: to determine what can be done over the long term. We are not short-term thinkers like the NDs. We are long-term thinkers, and we want long-term solutions to achieve sustainability and to do what is right. [interjections] We're getting a lot of noise here from the peanut gallery across the way.

Mr. Speaker, we want to achieve sustainability, we want to do the right thing, and that's why we're taking our time to really receive as much public input as we possibly can through the Commission on Learning to properly put in place the programs that will ensure affordability and sustainability for future generations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier: then how can the Premier have the sheer audacity and gall to pin the blame for funding shortfalls on school boards and teachers while his government sits on a secret \$3 billion surplus in last year's budget?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if I heard the leader of the third party correctly, he said: a secret \$3 billion fund. If he knows about a \$3 billion fund which I don't know about, then he knows of a secret that I don't know about. How he found out I have no idea, but perhaps he'd like to share that with us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Supportive Housing and Homeless Shelters

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my view that a very superficial pop culture book called *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has helped convince our generation that the best thing for the institutionalized mentally ill people is to set them free into the

community. My observation is that a significant number of these people are now semipermanent residents of institutions such as jails and homeless shelters, not to mention park benches and riverbanks, where they often come to harm and are certainly not able to get much of the proper help or stability they may require. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors. Given that reports indicate that the mentally ill may comprise 25 and maybe even 35 percent of all homeless shelter residents, what better options exist to provide more stable housing for these people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Woloshyn: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a concern that a large number of our residents in the homeless shelters are in fact having mental health problems. What we are currently doing is trying to address the need for more supportive housing, and I do have to say that the various nonprofit organizations across the province are accessing our funding through the provincial homeless initiative, also through the Canada affordable housing program.

2:00

More specifically, Mr. Speaker, some examples – and although they may be quite insufficient, they are a good start. In Edmonton the Salvation Army recently opened a long-term supportive housing residence for men with multiple barriers to living, these kind of people. Grande Prairie just announced the opening of Willow Place, I believe it is, which was through the affordable housing program. In Calgary the Bob Ward centre is currently being built. Also, we do have something called the Gunn Centre operated by our ministry, which is also focused on these people and is doing a very fine job of dealing with it on a long-term basis.

Do we need more spaces? Definitely. Is our goal to limit the number of semipermanent residents with these problems in the shelters? Most definitely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only one supplemental question. Could the minister tell us: what are the general costs per mattress on the floor of homeless shelters such as the Sunalta Shelter in Calgary?

Mr. Woloshyn: Mr. Speaker, the Sunalta Shelter is a big warehouse. It's a very big, open building, very clean, very well maintained, supplied by the city of Calgary for the last couple of seasons, I believe, as a temporary, short-term – and I stress “temporary, short-term,” that being about five or six months – accommodation. The city of Calgary picked up the cost of providing the building, the utilities that go with it, and also the busing, bringing the people from downtown to the shelter. Our contribution if we followed the request that's currently going forward – and, quite frankly, hon. member, I don't know if we're going to go this route or not. We are having a good look at what the appropriate actions are to be taken, but it would cost the ministry approximately \$380 to \$390 per mat per month to house these people in a wide open space with about a foot between the mats on the floor.

Livestock Feeding Industry

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of the drought Alberta is the highest feed cost region in North America. As producers are forced out of business, our livestock feeding industry is falling behind other producing regions. The flaws in the income disaster

program and the Alberta disaster assistance loan program plus the inequitable 2002 acreage payment program fall short of addressing the crisis the Alberta livestock feeding sector faces. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Is the livestock feeding industry still important to this government?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the livestock feeding industry is incredibly important to this government, and I believe it contributes about \$5.4 billion of the value-added processing industry in this province. There is no question that 2002 was one of the most challenging years that the agricultural industry as a whole has faced in this province. I am very proud of the resilience of that industry, and I'm very proud of the support that this government was able to provide to it through the various programs from the provincial government with some support from the federal government. It amounts to about \$1.4 billion, and that includes the livestock feeding industry.

Dr. Nicol: To the minister: will this government acknowledge that the \$1.5 billion spent on agriculture in 2002 was not equitably allocated and excluded many in the livestock grain feed industry?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I would not acknowledge that in any way. First of all, the program that was put in place was to support the feed industry for part of it, and it did that. We lost a very small percentage of our breeding herds, which was our aim. Producers spend years and years and years building up a herd, and there was a great danger of at least 25 percent of that herd being sold elsewhere or slaughtered.

Mr. Speaker, it was successful. We had 5.4 million head of cattle in our province in 2001, and our 2002 count shows 5.2 million head. That's the foundation for the feeding industry. There is no question that the feeding industry is under stress. There is no question that about 450,000 calves went south for feed this year, but our producers are optimistic. We've got a good start on this year. We hope our feed supplies will be back in place and the industry will continue to be a very strong part of the economy of this province.

Dr. Nicol: Again to the minister: when is the government going to help and step in and bridge the gap before the Alberta livestock feeding industry erodes beyond repair?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just give you an indication of where we do fill the gap and where we have stepped in. First of all, we have the farm income disaster program, which is a program where, whether you're in the feeding industry or the grain industry or any other part of the industry, if your income falls below 70 percent, that program is there to respond. We have a farm disaster loan that was started at the time of a crisis of low prices in the hog industry. That was continued. In fact, that program was changed this year to respond to this very issue, and the amount of the loan was raised to \$200,000, and the quick-cash aspect of it, which was \$20,000, was raised to \$50,000, and that \$50,000 can be accessed on a promissory note. There are a number of programs in this province that respond. I would repeat that at least \$1.4 billion was provided in support primarily from this provincial government to the industry.

Mr. Speaker, I probably meet with three or four industry groups a year. I think I could count on one hand the number of times that I have been at a presentation where I haven't had people get up and profusely thank this government for their support.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Softwood Lumber Policy Bulletin

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The future of the softwood lumber industry is important to communities in the West Yellowhead constituency and the forest-based communities. People in my constituency have heard about the draft policy bulletin that was worked out earlier this year by government and industry negotiators from Canada and the United States. My constituency and community leaders in the area were of the understanding that this draft policy bulletin could pave the way towards a long-term solution to the softwood lumber dispute. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Could the minister advise the Assembly of the status of this policy bulletin?

Mr. Jonson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge that the hon. Mr. Pettigrew, who has referred to this policy bulletin, has certainly worked very hard on behalf of the softwood lumber industry. However, I think the comments that have been reported perhaps are somewhat optimistic because there are still a number of outstanding issues needing to be addressed, such as the gap between what Canada and the U.S. see as a reasonable export tax rate and what should be done with the duties that the U.S. has already collected. Alberta would not support an export tax unless there is a clear indication before the tax is put in place of the conditions under which it would be removed and it was clear that this export tax was an interim provision before a solution would be reached.

Mr. Speaker, we are still waiting for the U.S. to publish an official policy bulletin which might set the stage for long-term solutions to the dispute. After the U.S. publishes its draft bulletin, there is a 30-day public review period. Then the U.S. would make appropriate changes to its bulletin and publish a final version. We will then study the final policy bulletin and consult with the Alberta industry. Only then will we be able to be in a position to work with the forestry industry further and make a counterproposal or agree to this final policy bulletin.

I'd also like to indicate by way of an update that NAFTA and WTO challenges are continuing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister advise the House how his department is looking at responding to the policy bulletin that is supposed to be coming from the U.S. Department of Commerce?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Once the policy bulletin is in its final form and is published, the Alberta government, of course, will study it to try and determine as to whether it provides the means for Albertans' best interest in relation to the countervailing and antidumping to be revoked or not. So, yes, we will be studying the process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking at a question to the same minister: how would the softwood lumber dispute impact the local community timber program that exists throughout Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, this is going to take a bit of time, but it is very, very important to the member and others. The community

timber program is very important. There are about 128 small sawmillers and loggers . . .

Dr. Taylor: How many?

Mr. Cardinal: About 128. About four to five communities, in fact, depend on forestry as their major source of income and also for job creation. We've managed in the last two years throughout the negotiations to keep separate the companies that produce less than 5 million board feet, Mr. Speaker, because most of the product they sell is used domestically and not exported, so we've managed to do that.

West Nile Virus

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, recent evidence from other provinces shows that human illness from West Nile virus is more widespread than originally thought. Even worse, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* reports that the effects of the virus are more severe than expected, in many cases requiring long-term intensive medical treatment. To put this in perspective, there were more cases of West Nile virus in humans in Ontario last year than there were of SARS this year, and there is little doubt that West Nile will hit Alberta this summer. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* emphasizes "the need to provide adequate resources for diagnostic laboratory support," can the minister explain how labs in Alberta may be expected to test hundreds of possible cases when they did not receive an increase in funding?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that previously when it came to matters as it related to West Nile virus, we had to use a federal laboratory that was in Winnipeg – and it is a very, very good laboratory – but in an effort to speed up access, we do have our own Provincial Laboratory that's being set up here in the province of Alberta. So for those cases where it's suspected that there may be West Nile virus, those tests will be done right here in Alberta as opposed to Winnipeg.

Dr. Taft: To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: given that legislation requires workers to refuse to work in unduly hazardous situations, what steps will employers be required to take to protect outdoor workers from the dangers of contracting West Nile virus? Will his department issue a bulletin?

Mr. Dunford: Actually, I'm not aware, as the question is asked here today, regarding the plans that workplace health and safety has for the summer season. So I'll take that question under advisement and certainly get back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health to supplement?

Mr. Mar: Yes, sir. Mr. Speaker, I should say that it will be important not just for workers but for all Albertans who are out of doors this summer. We will have an education program to indicate to Albertans how best to avoid being bitten in the first place. I would expect that people who are in areas where there are large numbers of mosquitoes, particularly the three species that do carry West Nile virus, would take additional precautions and wear baggy, long-sleeved and long-trousered clothing and wear a repellent that contains DEET. So we do have a plan in place with respect to West Nile virus. It will involve the monitoring of mosquitoes; lab testing improvements, as I've already indicated; physician education so that

physicians are aware of what the symptoms are and what to look for; and a public awareness campaign that will again advise members of the public how to best avoid getting bitten in the first place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: has the minister considered the impact on the WCB of workers making claims based on the possibility that they contracted West Nile virus during the course of their work?

Mr. Dunford: Those kinds of discussions, I think, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, and as other members would know, start in the area of the experts that we have on staff. As yet, nothing has come to me for a particular decision in that particular area, but we're meeting with officials this afternoon on other matters, and I'll bring this one up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Telehealth

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine spoke with me recently about telehealth and relayed to me the benefits that the program could have on the health system here in Alberta. While the average Albertan may not be aware of the potential of telehealth, regional health authorities are increasingly using the technology to enhance health care in our province. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us how the development of telehealth services in Alberta is progressing and what he is doing to advance the service?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I should say first of all that the reason for our strong support for telehealth is to enhance access to clinical services for Albertans, and in order to do that, we have to put some significant resources into this area. The department has already spent close to \$15 million in the early stages of development of telehealth in the form of base funding and grants, and an additional \$800,000 was recently committed to support development of clinical services within telehealth.

Mr. Speaker, one only needs to look at today's *Edmonton Journal* to see a story of an excellent demonstration of how telehealth works. A young girl, six years old, whose family lives in Athabasca previously had to come into Edmonton a number of times a month in order to see a speech pathologist. Now through telehealth that family can avoid that two-hour drive, and the six-year-old girl still gets access to a speech pathologist through telehealth, which dramatically improves the access of delivery of service to this young person.

So, Mr. Speaker, improving access to services is one aspect of telehealth. The second aspect, of course, is the cost savings associated with ensuring that patients don't need to drive or travel, that specialists themselves, who may reside only in Calgary and Edmonton, need not travel outside of their centres, where their homes are. We are also able to provide tremendous rural physician education through using the some 225 different videoconferencing and teleradiology systems that are throughout the province, making it one of the largest such systems in the world.

Mr. Johnson: My one and only supplemental is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What effect will SuperNet have on telehealth?

Mr. Doerksen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister of health referred to the exact same article that I was going to refer to to illustrate the advantages of remote distance therapy. The issue that most small communities face is a lack of bandwidth to be able to provide those kinds of advanced technology services in a health application field. What SuperNet does is it delivers that required bandwidth to most of the rural communities across Alberta to enable access for every citizen in this province to these kinds of health services, education services, information services. SuperNet is going to make a huge difference in a lot of areas.

Mosquito Control Program

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, the West Nile virus is expected to claim its first victims in our province this year, and the problem is only expected to get worse in the future. In spite of this fact, this government refuses to work to prevent the disease's transmission. The Centers for Disease Control have said that mosquito control is the most effective way to prevent the transmission of West Nile virus. To the Minister of Environment: why isn't this government going to protect its citizens by introducing a mosquito abatement program?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Until the early '90s – it might have been the late '80s but in that time frame from '88 to '92 – the government worked with the various communities on mosquito abatement programs, and at that stage the municipalities took over the programs. This year there are eight municipalities that are involved with mosquito abatement programs, so we are in fact encouraging the municipalities. My own community of Medicine Hat is certainly involved with the mosquito abatement program, and I would like to congratulate them for that.

Ms Carlson: Why hasn't the Minister of Environment explored environmentally friendly alternatives to mosquito control like BTI, a microbial larvicide?

Dr. Taylor: Once again, Mr. Speaker, certainly, the mosquito abatement program, as I've said, is the responsibility of the municipalities. If any municipality wishes to ask for information on the particular biological controls, we're certainly willing to investigate that with the municipalities. But as we move forward, this is a municipal issue. We will work with municipalities on these issues.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, given that municipalities in the province simply can't afford mosquito abatement programs because of this government's downloading policies, when is the Minister of Environment going to push for provincial funding for a province-wide mosquito abatement program? Lives will be at stake over this.

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, municipalities can afford it. As I've said, there are six or eight municipalities that are doing it. If they couldn't afford it, they wouldn't be doing it. So they can afford to do it. They are doing it.

As the minister of health has quite clearly defined in an earlier question, we have good educational programs out there as to how to prevent West Nile virus. For instance – the minister of health didn't mention this – Environment works with communities on standing water, because it's obvious that the mosquitoes are breeding in standing water. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for the

agricultural industry, from the West Nile side of it there's going to be a lot of standing water in southern Alberta this year because of the snowfall and the amount of rain that we've had.

So it is a serious issue. We do take it seriously, and we will continue to work with the department of health on our abatement policies and continue to provide educational programs as to how Albertans can prevent themselves from getting this illness.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to supplement.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I only wish to challenge one statement that was made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and that is that we need to keep in mind that the risk of contracting West Nile virus in Alberta remains low. We are vigilant about the risk that is associated with it, but the risk remains very low. We do have a plan right now that is based on environmental and biological factors that are specific to this particular province. Practices that may exist in other jurisdictions, while we can learn from them, are not entirely transferable to this province. If the circumstances change, there may be a possibility that our response will change as a consequence of that, but we do have a plan in place that is the right plan for the particular circumstances that we currently face.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Education Funding

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seems to have trouble coming up with a logical and consistent explanation for the crisis in education. In fact, the Premier toggles back and forth between blaming school boards and teachers for the crisis and denying that the crisis exists at all. To assist the Premier, I have prepared these questions for him today. Question 1: is the proof of a school crisis (a) teacher layoffs, (b) school closures, (c) program cuts, or (d) all of the above?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you know, for a well-educated person he is very, very sloppy in the design of his questions, because he left out one important answer, and that is: none of the above. That's the one I would take.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Question 2: is the main cause of the school crisis (a) the government's refusal to fund the teachers' arbitration, (b) high utility bills, (c) the cap on grade 10 credits, or (d) all of the above?

Mr. Klein: Well, again sloppiness in question design, Mr. Speaker, and for that he gets an F. I would say: none of the above. Not all of the above but none of the above.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the Premier that'll be getting the F, I suspect.

Number 3: are the consequences of the school crisis (a) shortchanging our children, (b) loss of qualified teachers, (c) angry parents, (d) fewer Tory seats in the next election, or (e) all of the above?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if there's anything below an F, he would get it because he gets sloppier and sloppier. He forgot to include one important answer, and that is: none of the above.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

West Nile Virus (continued)

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last number of weeks many horse owners have taken the added precaution of protecting their animals against West Nile virus by vaccinating them. However, there are a number of horse owners and horse associations that have taken the stance of asking the government to compensate them for any horses that may die as a result of this disease. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What is the province's policy on this?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there is no provincial compensation program for the loss of livestock from infectious diseases including West Nile, and I'd just like to give three or four points as to why. Owners are not compensated for any infectious disease such as anthrax or for a horse that dies from sleeping sickness or animals that die from any number of diseases. The CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, is the lead agency in Canada for determining when compensation should occur, and that generally occurs when animals are destroyed to avoid contagion with other animals or to control or eradicate a federally reportable disease. It is important for horse owners to understand that West Nile virus is not contagious from horse to horse. As the member indicated, there is a licensed vaccine in place for West Nile virus in horses, and certainly we are recommending that horse owners speak to their veterinarians about prevention.

Another point I would make, Mr. Speaker, is that insurance is available to horse owners for their animals. The last thing I would say on this is that West Nile virus is a reportable disease in the designated communicable disease regulation in Alberta, and we are a part of the West Nile plan and are working very closely with the ministries of health and environment on surveillance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental – and it will be my last question – is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Could the minister explain what his department is doing to monitor and detect the early presence of West Nile virus in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite pleased to report as to how my department monitors for this virus. Our monitoring includes gathering of crows that have recently died – and most are submitted, of course, by the public – and then examining the birds and forwarding them to local Alberta labs for testing. If we do get a confirmed case of West Nile virus, our staff will promptly notify the provincial officers of health for further action.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Aids to Daily Living Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors and other

Albertans who rely on the Alberta Aids to Daily Living program are nervous about how this government's plan to make health regions responsible for the program will work. They are concerned about how the change will affect their benefits and whether the program is in jeopardy. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the minister going to envelope the money for the Aids to Daily Living program for the regional health authorities so that it can't be spent on other areas?

Mr. Mar: Yes.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister set a minimum standard of service and equipment that must be provided by every health region through this program?

Mr. Mar: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Given the experience parents are having with the devolution of the speech therapy program to the RHAs, what safeguards will the minister put in place to make sure that this is not the first step towards eliminating or curtailing the Alberta Aids to Daily Living program?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I think that she really asked that question in the first two. We will envelope the money to ensure that the 70-some million dollars that currently go to the 76,000 people in this province for Aids to Daily Living will continue to be spent in that area and that appropriate standards will be put in place by the province, and it will be our expectation that regional health authorities will meet those standards in delivering the program. It is important that we do move this important service to the regional health authority level, where it is closer to the people that are actually being served, and that just makes good sense, that decisions are made at a level where they are closer to patients who are using this important service.

head: **Recognitions**

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we have seven members who are going to be participating in Recognitions, but I'm going to vary the routine just a bit and call on the Deputy Speaker first.

Page Recognition

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The deputy chairman and I would like to draw to the attention of all hon. members that we are going to lose seven of our wonderful pages when this session ends. They are Nicholas Fowler, Erin Weisgerber, Paul Groch, Stephen Michalyk, Craig Chupka, Megan Lau, and Sarah Monkman.

These fine young people will be leaving their duties in the Assembly following the close of the spring session, and I would ask you to join me in recognizing the great efforts of our pages who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out their tasks with attention to duty and with good humour. So on behalf of all the hon. members here I ask our head page, Nicholas Fowler, to give each retiring page our gift and take with it our best wishes to each and every one.

We were honoured to have had you work with us in the Alberta Legislature. Thank you very much and good luck. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I received a letter today from the seven pages in question, and it's addressed to you, and I'd like you to listen to what they have to say to you.

Dear Mr. Speaker,

It is said that a teacher affects eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops. As we 7 who now graduate from our woefully short term as pages, reflect on our time with this Legislative Assembly, the truth of this saying has never been more clear.

Through the experiences we have had in the last few years, we have gained a unique insight into the parliamentary system and a fond understanding of the foundations on which it is based. Everyday as pages we have had the rare opportunity to view the integrity of 83 men and women, as they stand up for what they believe in, fighting to make our province a better place. It is hard not to look on with admiration when these men and women stand unafraid to voice their opinions and belief, representing the people of Alberta with examples of honour and class that we can only one day hope to attain. We have seen first hand the inner workings of the democratic process, the bad days and the good days, the disagreements and the co-operation. Through it all we have grown and learned more than can be expressed, from the 83 members from across the house, through the dignity and respect they have shown one another in what is often times a difficult process.

And now as we near the time that we will be closing this memorable chapter of our lives, we would like to express how truly grateful we are for having been given this opportunity. In more ways than can be explained, you have taught us, through your actions and through your words and helped us to grow perhaps a little more mature than when we began. Though we may not pursue a life related to politics, the lessons we have taken from within these walls will carry through to the rest of our lives. We can only hope that we too will grow to be people of the same level of dignity, integrity and understanding that you have proven yourselves to be. Thank you sincerely to all members, officers and staff of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. You have given us more than you will ever know.

Thank you from Nick Fowler, Erin Weisgerber, Paul Groch, Stephen Michalyk, Craig Chupka, Sarah Monkman, and Megan Lau.

ACT Foundation

Mrs. Gordon: The ACT Foundation is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping high school students across Canada implement a core curriculum CPR program for youth. They have recently established a partnership with the two school divisions in my constituency, Wolf Creek and Clearview. Students from Lacombe composite high school and William E. Hay composite high school in Stettler will be working on this. All youth will be taught the early warning signs of developing medical emergencies, how to react, and the practical skills of CPR, also the Heimlich manoeuvre.

Recognition and thanks go to the STARS Foundation of Alberta, who will be donating mannequins and paying costs related to teacher training and other needed teaching materials; the *Stettler Independent* for donating the printing of student manuals; and corporate health partners AstraZeneca and Aventis Pharma and Pfizer Canada, pharmaceutical companies who willingly provide core funding to the ACT Foundation. By working together we are empowering teens to save lives.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Seniors' Week

Ms Kryczka: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During Seniors' Week 2003 from June 1 to 7 special events will be held across Alberta to recognize the importance of 327,000-and-growing seniors in our

communities. Seniors' Week is a very wonderful time for seniors, but all year-round there are hundreds of seniors' organizations in Alberta who represent seniors in numerous ways.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, or CARP, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind are but two national organizations. The Alberta Association of Meals on Wheels, the Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association, or ASCHA, the Alberta Senior Citizens Sport & Recreation Association, the Alberta Council on Aging are four of the many provincial organizations. Locally there is the Picture Butte Happy Oldtimers, the Redwater & District Pioneer Club, the Spruce Grove Golden Age Club, the Bow Cliff Seniors 50+ in Calgary, and the Jewish Family Service of Calgary. The Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta is a government-appointed body of citizens chaired by an MLA appointed by the Premier. It consults with seniors and those who represent them on issues of importance to seniors. Indeed, Alberta seniors are fortunate to have a multitude of organizations working to keep them vital, active, and involved.

Thank you.

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

St. Paul RCMP Regimental Ball

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency was honoured to host the commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Giuliano Zaccardelli, at the RCMP regimental ball recently held in St. Paul.

Commissioner Zaccardelli served his first recruit posting in St. Paul in 1972 and became the 20th commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 2000. Commissioner Zaccardelli's brief visit to Alberta included a stop in Edmonton, where he spoke with the RCMP staff relations officers on the future direction of the RCMP and to a group of DARE instructors.

Staff Sergeant Jim Fell, noncommissioned officer in charge of the St. Paul RCMP detachment, and staff are to be commended for their role in the success of this visit and their commitment to the protection of our community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Gerri Cook

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure to have the opportunity to recognize my good friend Gerri Cook. Gerri was the very deserving recipient on April 5 of the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association 2003 Friend of the Industry award. She was honoured for her dedication to the field of animation and children's programming.

Gerri has more than 25 years of experience in the Canadian television industry working as a project developer, award-winning scriptwriter, producer, investment fund creator, manager, mentor, and role model. From being a founding director in the 1970s of the Alberta Television and Film Institute to her leading edge, three-dimensional animation show that also won an award on April 5, Gerri has been a dedicated supporter of the Alberta industry. She has worked hard to ensure that the Alberta industry is innovative, producing quality product that is globally competitive.

Gerri and her husband, Steve Moore, who has worked side by side with her over the years, have made a real difference to this industry and the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

2:40

Museum of the Regiments

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize the Museum of the Regiments, another great Calgary-Currie institution. Certainly among the finest military museums in all of Canada the museum honours such famous regiments as Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Lord Strathcona's Horse, as well as other western Canadian regiments and naval forces. It is a definite must-see for military buffs, tourists, and residents alike.

Soon it will have the largest library collection of Canadian military history in existence and very appropriately so since Calgary-Currie does indeed have a very proud military history. In fact, our riding is named after General Sir Arthur Currie, popularly known as Guts and Gaitors to his men during World War I.

Congratulations to the many hundreds of volunteers and veterans whose efforts have so successfully built the museum these past many years and all the best on their fund-raising and plans for the future. Thanks to them future generations of Albertans and Canadians now have an outstanding opportunity to learn about Canada's proud military past and to ensure we never forget how hard it has been to keep freedom alive in this world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Shawna Churchill

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to salute Shawna Churchill of Medicine Hat, winner of the 2003 Norm McLeod Dream Weaver award. This award was created by the PDD Provincial Board to commemorate the 35-year career of Norm McLeod, its former CEO, and his commitment to promote community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities.

As adviser for the self-advocate program in Medicine Hat Shawna has made a positive impact on countless people in the Medicine Hat region. She has inspired them to believe and to succeed. Because of her selfless dedication she regularly goes above and beyond what is required. Shawna also spends time supporting her colleagues in developing their skills and in educating other professionals about the needs and the rights of people with disabilities, their challenges and their opportunities. As one of Shawna's nominators stated: there are a lot of people that are working in the community because of Shawna's belief that we can do anything we put our mind to.

Congratulations, Shawna, and thank you for your outstanding work with and for persons with developmental disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ron LaJeunesse

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to recognize and celebrate this year's recipient of the Grant MacEwan literary award, Ron LaJeunesse, for his book *Political Asylums*. This book traces in very concrete, unsentimental terms Alberta's short history of government-supported care for people with mental illness.

I can't recognize Ron's tremendous support without also recognizing the unique program which allowed him time to write and supported him during a year's sabbatical from his work with the Canadian Mental Health Association. That program is the Muttart fellowship program, which is designed to develop research and other materials to benefit the charitable sector and to provide senior managers within the social services sector with an opportunity for a

sabbatical year to recharge and renew. We all gain from this program and Mr. LaJeunesse's work.

Mr. LaJeunesse was presented with the Grant MacEwan literary award and the \$25,000 cheque, which is funded by Community Development, at the May 10 gala jointly sponsored by the Writers' Guild of Alberta and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 133 Albertans, mostly from Calgary, which reads:

Whereas grandparents in Alberta often experience access denial to their grandchildren, which is contrary to the best interests and rights of children, including their support, development, and well-being.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to make the necessary changes to legislation and enable the grandparents to maintain ongoing contact with their grand-children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition to present today, and it's from the concerned parents of Grand Yellowhead regional division wanting the Grand Yellowhead regional division No. 35 board to review their plan for the school space in Edson, signed by 132 people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 1,052 Albertans petitioning the provincial government to "establish a provincially subsidized monthly transit pass program for low income Albertans that would apply to all municipalities with a public transit system."

head: Notices of Motions

Mr. Jonson: Mr. Speaker, I would seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to consider the circulated document relative to Senate reform, found on all members' desks, as being oral notice and as read into the record.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I think what you're seeking basically is unanimous consent for oral notice of the motion, not the latter part.

Mr. Jonson: Both.

The Speaker: I will be guided by the intent of the House with respect to this, but I want to provide a caution with respect to this matter. An hon. member standing up asking for oral notice – at this point in time the chair does not know what the oral notice is about. Presumably, a document has been circulated. The House has no record of such a document. If there is a procedural problem with the motion later, the chair might find himself at a disadvantage in having to deal with a procedural question with respect to whatever might be in the motion and not having seen the motion, not having heard the motion, being unaware of what the motion is. But the request was made for unanimous consent. We'll be guided by the decision of the House.

Request for unanimous consent for the oral notice side. The

second side had to do with the reading of the motion, and I think it would be very, very important that the motion should be read into it. So for oral notice, unanimous consent would then allow the minister to go forward with the reading of the motion. Okay? Clear? So it's unanimous consent to provide . . . [interjection] No, no. This again, very clear – okay? – from a procedural point, because I sense by the body language of the House that everybody understands, but I want to make sure that nobody does not understand.

The request here is for unanimous consent for oral notice for the minister to proceed. That being given, the minister will then read the motion. Is there unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Well, it's not given.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: On a point of procedure, Mr. Speaker, and for clarification, I believe the hon. member is entitled to rise and give oral notice without the unanimous consent of the House. What he was asking for unanimous consent of was to have it considered; in other words, to deliver to *Hansard* this written notice, which all members have, so that he didn't have to actually read it into the record. It would be printed into the record as though it was read.

So he is entitled to proceed but now to give oral notice by reading this to the House as the House has asked for.

The Speaker: Well, I think that's correct, and perhaps I did not provide the clearest clarification. The chair basically understands that this can be proceeded with by way of oral notice. [interjection] That's not required anyway, the unanimous consent. It's the reading of the thing.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: If unanimous consent is given for oral notice so that the minister doesn't have to read this, does unanimous consent also have to be given by the House before the motion can be introduced? That is my question.

The Speaker: No. There is a point later, hon. member, where that would have to be given. Right now we're just given the notice. The only thing the chair is saying is that it sure would be helpful if it was also read into it. In order to proceed with it, there will be another section later in the day that would have to be dealt with under Orders of the Day.

Mr. Mason: With unanimous consent?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Speaker: Right now we're just on the oral notice side. I presume that assurance has been given to the hon. minister to proceed? Is it agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I'm assuming it has. Proceed, hon. minister.

2:50

Mr. Jonson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my apologies for contributing to that delay.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to give oral notice on the following motion.

Be it resolved that given that the current process of appointing Senators offends Canadians' democratic values, has deprived that House of political legitimacy and efficacy, and has prevented the Senate from being effective in protecting the interests of the provinces of Canada, the Legislative Assembly directs the government of Alberta to consult with Albertans on reforming the Senate through the following constitutional amendment; namely, by repealing sections 21 to 34 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and substituting the following:

21 (1) The Senate shall consist of elected members called Senators.

(2) Each Province shall be represented in the Senate by 6 Senators.

(3) Each Territory shall be represented in the Senate by 2 Senators.

22 (1) Subject to this section, the Senators representing a Province or Territory shall be elected by the electors of that Province or Territory.

(2) The legislature of a Province or of a Territory may make laws relating to the election of Senators representing that Province or Territory, including the method of election and the procedure for the election.

(3) Except in the case of by-elections, and except in the case of the first election held pursuant to this section, the election of one-half of the Senators representing a Province or Territory shall be held in conjunction with the general elections of members of the legislative assembly of the Province or of the Territory.

(4) Except as otherwise provided in subsection (6) and unless the office is sooner vacated, and except in the case of a Senator elected in a by-election, the term of office of a Senator representing a Province or Territory continues until the official announcement of the results of the Senate elections held in conjunction with the second general election in that Province or Territory after the election of that Senator.

(5) The first election held pursuant to this section in each Province or Territory shall be for the election of all the Senators representing that Province or Territory.

(6) The term of office for one-half of the Senators elected from each Province and Territory at the first election held pursuant to this section in each Province or Territory continues until the official announcement of the results of the Senate elections held in conjunction with the next general election in that Province or Territory.

(7) In relation to the Senators representing that Province or Territory, the legislature of a Province or of a Territory may make laws establishing which Senators subsection (6) applies to.

23 (1) Subject to this section, a person is qualified to be a candidate and to be elected Senator if the person is eligible to be a candidate and to be elected as a member of the House of Commons.

(2) A person is not qualified to be elected as a Senator or to remain a Senator if the person

(a) is a member of the House of Commons or of the legislative assembly of a Province or of a Territory, or

(b) is a Minister of the Crown

(3) If any question arises respecting the qualification of a Senator, the question shall be heard and determined by the Senate.

24 (1) A Senator may resign his or her seat by delivering a resignation to the Governor General.

(2) When a Senator resigns his or her seat in accordance with subsection (1), the seat immediately becomes vacant.

25 (1) A by-election to fill a vacancy in the Senate representation of a Province or Territory need not be called if

- (a) the vacancy occurs during the last year of the legal life of the legislative assembly of the Province or of the Territory, and
- (b) the term of office of the Senator who vacated that seat would have expired with the announcement of the results of the Senate elections held in conjunction with the next general election in the Province or Territory.

(2) The term of office for a Senator elected at a by-election shall be for the balance of the term of the Senator who vacated the seat.

26. The Senate may establish its own procedure for the election of the Speaker of the Senate and for the conduct of the Senate's business.

27. Subject to section 53, bills proposed to the Parliament of Canada may originate in the Senate equally as in the House of Commons.

28 (1) Where a bill is presented to the Senate after being passed by the House of Commons, if the Senate

- (a) votes against passing the bill,
- (b) passes the bill with amendments that are not acceptable to the House of Commons, or
- (c) fails to vote on the bill within 180 days after it is presented to the Senate,

the bill may be brought before the House of Commons and if again passed by the House of Commons, with such amendments made by the Senate as are concurred in by the House, the bill may be presented to the Governor General for assent, and when assented to has the same force and effect as if passed in that form by the Senate.

(2) In a bill presented to the Governor General under this section, the words of enactment shall be amended by striking out any reference to the Senate.

(3) An alteration to a bill to give effect to subsection (2) is deemed not to be an amendment of the bill.

(4) This section does not apply to a bill referred to in section 30.

29. If the Speaker of the Senate or of the House of Commons rules that the subject matter of a bill is wholly or partially within section 94A or 95, the bill may be repassed by the House of Commons under section 28 only if

- (a) the percentage of the members voting who vote to pass the bill is greater than the percentage of Senators voting who voted to reject the bill or pass it with amendments, or
- (b) the Senate fails to vote on the bill within 180 days after it is presented to the Senate.

30. Where a bill is presented to the Senate after being passed by the House of Commons and the Speaker of the Senate or of the House of Commons rules that the bill

- (a) directly affects in any way, including by taxation, the natural resources of a Province,
- (b) authorizes the expenditure of federal funds in areas of provincial jurisdiction under sections 92, 92A and 93,
- (c) is binding on a Province, or
- (d) declares a local work or undertaking to be of the general advantage of Canada or for the advantage of two or more Provinces

if the Senate votes against passing the bill or passes it with amendments not acceptable to the House of Commons, no further proceedings may take place.

31. Appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada and to the Federal Court of Appeal have no effect until they are ratified by the Senate.

32. No treaty shall be ratified by Canada unless the Senate has authorized Canada to ratify the treaty.

And be it further resolved that given that the Constitution establishes Canada as a federal system of government in which the sovereign powers of the Crown are divided between two separate but equal orders of government and that the federal Parliament is

comprised of two Houses, the House of Commons, which is designed to reflect the democratic principle of representation by population, and a Senate, which is designed to reflect the federal nature of Canada, and that Canada is a parliamentary democracy that has constitutionally enshrined the democratic right of every citizen of Canada to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons and of their Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Assembly directs the government of Alberta to initiate discussions with the government of Canada and the governments of all other provinces and territories leading to the reform of the Senate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development on behalf of the hon. Minister of Government Services.

Bill 44

Personal Information Protection Act

Mr. Norris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Member for Livingstone-MacLeod to request leave to introduce a bill being the Personal Information Protection Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

3:00

Bill 45

Family Law Act

Ms Graham: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave this afternoon to introduce Bill 45, the Family Law Act.

After chairing the MLA review of the maintenance enforcement program and child access in 1998 and more recently the Unified Family Court Task Force, it is indeed a pleasure to introduce this bill. This bill will consolidate provincial family law under one act while updating it to reflect current legal practices and the current needs of Albertans. It will make it easier for Albertans to understand family law.

This bill follows extensive work done by Alberta Justice to review all provincial family law and to consult with the public, the legal community, and other stakeholders. I'd like to recognize the members of the family law reform project team from Alberta Justice. They are John Booth, Averie McNary, Marleen Poon, Ronda Goulden, Nolan Steed, Clark Dalton, and Earl Evaniew, who drafted the legislation. This legislation, Mr. Speaker, incorporates recommendations from the before-mentioned MLA review committee, the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and the input received through Alberta Justice's family law reform project.

Mr. Speaker, apart from consolidating Alberta family law, this bill also proposes amendments to a number of areas including guardianship; parenting, which was formerly known as custody and access; contact with a child; and spousal and adult interdependent partner support. This bill will be held over until the fall sitting of the Legislature to provide Albertans and the legal community with the opportunity to review the bill and provide further input.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 45, the Family Law Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development I wish to table today the 2002-2003 inspection report of animal facilities at the three Alberta universities using animals in research and education, as required under section 52(5) of the Universities Act. I'm pleased to say that all of the requirements were met under the Canadian Council on Animal Care guidelines.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table responses to questions raised during the Committee of Supply for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on May 7, 2003.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, this morning a function was held announcing a joint initiative of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the University of Alberta, and the Alberta Research Council; namely, Agri-Food Discovery Place, which is being built at the U of A to aid in making Alberta's food supply safer. I am tabling with the House the news release filed in the appropriate numbers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and table the required number of copies of the Compliance Assessment & Enforcement Initiatives annual report. There's one statement in here that says: "By raising the level of awareness about Alberta Environment's compliance objectives, and by fostering a spirit of stewardship for the environment by all Albertans, the department seeks to prevent non-compliance through a heightened awareness of environmental responsibilities." This is a report about non-compliance, so in some sense industry has failed, and in some sense we have failed because we haven't done our job well enough yet. But we are working on it, and we are getting better as we go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Ms Graham: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the news release and backgrounder describing a landmark agreement, the first of its kind in Canada, which was signed today by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the University of Alberta, and the Alberta Research Council, which I represented as chair. The agreement establishes the Institute for Food, Agri-Industrial, and Agricultural Sciences, Alberta. The founding members will pool resources, staff and facilities valued at over \$750 million, to collaboratively manage and deliver ag research, product development, and education programs to benefit Alberta's producers, processors, and consumers and to attract new private and public investment to our important agricultural industry.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First of all, I have the required number of copies of about 40-plus letters from people in my constituency regarding reducing the cost of WCB.

The second tabling is a letter to the editor of the *Western Review* in Drayton Valley just commending the good work of the people of

Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency as well as their MLA with regard to advancing the Alberta agenda, which today's motion speaks to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings today. The first one is addressed to the hon. Premier from the concerned parents of Grande Yellowhead regional division re their plan on closure and transfer of schools in the Edson area from Grande Yellowhead regional division No. 35 to Living Waters Catholic regional division No. 42. The second one is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure with the same concerns, and the third one is to the hon. Minister of Learning on the same subject.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the required number of copies of correspondence signed by 42 of my constituents with regard to the Condominium Property Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of four letters to table today. Three are from constituents, and one is from the village of Cremona, all in support of the Didsbury hospital becoming part of the Calgary health region.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of documents signed by 71 Albertans requesting that the government of Alberta take immediate steps to address funding issues affecting Our Lady of the Assumption school in the Calgary-Bow constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview and is a submission signed by 131 individuals expressing their concern about the crisis in education, reductions in teaching staff, large class sizes, and the elimination of programs like music and special academic programs. There are five copies of that.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a submission to be made to the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living next month entitled Creating Protections for Better Lives of Vulnerable Seniors in Care Today and in The Future. It's prepared by Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare, also known as FAIRE.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document signed by 872 Albertans that represent many cities and towns throughout the province. They are urging the government

to acknowledge that the maintenance and construction costs of schools, hospitals, and roads are part of the provincial debt and to consider splitting the budget surplus between the monetary debt and the infrastructure debt.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is a petition signed by 77 citizens of Alberta, most of them from the city of Calgary. These citizens are calling for “an immediate increase in AISH . . . and SFI . . . rates based on the feedback received during the government’s low-income review.”

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of The Stakeholder Coalition for Economic Transmission Policy, which was a presentation to the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Development on February 25, 2002.

The third tabling is a copy of a letter that was received by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and also by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. It is a letter to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General dated May 14, 2003, and it’s from the mayor, His Worship Bill Smith. This is in regard to Bill 42, the Electoral Divisions Act, and the mayor is imploring us in this Assembly “not to ignore the opposition to Edmonton’s loss of voice” with the redistribution.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I’d table five copies of two e-mails from Bonnie Dani, a teacher who is going to be affected by the cuts in Edmonton public, who states in part that she feels that she’s being “forced out” of the profession and is having great difficulty understanding why the government doesn’t fund the arbitrated settlement with teachers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ve got two tablings today. The first one is a letter addressed to me about two weeks ago from one of my constituents – the name of the constituent is H el ene O’Connor – who is looking forward to going to the University of Ottawa for her medical degree in French, the second language. On completion of her degree Miss O’Connor would be returning to Edmonton and offering services in both official languages to Albertans. However, she is concerned with the rising cost of medical education and requests that some additional financial support be provided to her and other Albertans like her who are pursuing their studies for good reason outside of Alberta.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a set of six letters out of more than 40 that my office has received over the last little while. These letters are from members of Edmonton’s deaf community, interpretive students, parents of deaf children, and deaf associations, all concerned about the sudden closure of the ASL interpreter program at Grant MacEwan College. I’ll quickly read the names of the writers. The first letter is from the president of the Edmonton Association of the Deaf; the second one from Dr. David Mason, a professor and deaf activist; the third one from the president of the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf; the fourth one from the Alberta Cultural Society of the Deaf; the fifth from the president of the Alberta Association of the Deaf; and the last one is a letter from the mother of a deaf child who reminds this House and the government that accessibility for a deaf child means having qualified interpreters to make day-to-day events such as going to school or going to the doctor possible for her.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling a letter today from William Daly dated April 11, 2003. This senior is concerned with the ever increasing utility costs and inflation in Alberta and says that it’s forcing many seniors to go without prescriptions for false teeth, glasses, and hearing aids because they can no longer afford them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of one report relating to electricity prices. It discusses how people are being misled by inflation into thinking that long-term electrical prices are going up when in fact they are going down in real dollars. It outlines how California electricity prices before the attempted restructuring were nearly 14 cents per kilowatt-hour expressed in Canadian dollars and how average U.S. residential prices across the nation in 2002 were about 13 cents per kilowatt-hour in Canadian dollars, apparently the lowest price in 30 years in real dollars. The report is titled Electricity Retail Price Fact Sheet from the U.S. Department of Energy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk.

By the hon. Mrs. Nelson, Minister of Finance, the Automobile Insurance Board annual report for the year ending December 31, 2002; the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation 2002 annual report; the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2002; and the report entitled General Revenue Fund: Details of Grants, Supplies and Services, Capital Assets and Other, by Payee for the year ended March 31, 2002.

By the hon. Mr. Dunford, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, response to Written Question 3 asked for by Mr. MacDonald on March 17, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Woloshyn, Minister of Seniors, response to Written Question 5 asked for by Ms Blakeman on March 17, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Coutts, Minister of Government Services, response to Written Question 6 asked for by Mr. MacDonald on March 17, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, response to Written Question 8 asked for by Ms Carlson on March 17, 2003.

By the hon. Dr. Taylor, Minister of Environment, response to Written Question 10 asked for by Ms Carlson on March 17, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Stelmach, Minister of Transportation, response to Written Question 11 asked for by Mr. Bonner on April 14, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of Municipal Affairs, response to Written Question 12 asked for by Mr. Bonner on April 14, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Mar, Minister of Health and Wellness, return to order of the Assembly MR3 asked for by Dr. Taft on March 17, 2003; and return to order of the Assembly MR6 asked for by Dr. Taft on March 17, 2003.

By the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Gaming, responses to questions raised on April 10, 2003, Department of Gaming 2003-04 Committee of Supply debate; a letter dated May 14, 2003, from the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Gaming, to Wendy M. Sauv e of Edmonton regarding the distribution of funds from the Alberta lottery fund; responses to Written Question 13 and Written Question 14 asked for by Ms Blakeman on April 28, 2003.

head: **Orders of the Day**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would seek unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 61(2) to allow for third reading of Bill 40, the Appropriation Act, 2003, on the same day that it's reported out of Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I also seek unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 38(1) requiring notice to allow for debate on the government motion introduced by oral notice this afternoon by the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, the Senate resolution, on the same day as oral notice was given.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The Chair: I now call the Committee of the Whole to order, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has indicated he wished to speak before we say what we're going to do.

**Point of Order
Gestures**

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I regret to inform you and the Assembly that the Minister of Economic Development, to express his dissatisfaction with the exercise of our duties in this House, saw fit to give us a single-finger salute, if I may put it delicately, and I know that other members on this side have also witnessed this event. This follows a similar situation in the Ontario Legislature just yesterday, which resulted in quite a severe response from the Speaker there. So I would suggest that the hon. member is behaving in a way that is unparliamentary and, although it is unspoken, falls afoul of section 23(j) of our rules: "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I would argue, in fact, that given our guests today and the issues raised about sign language, the minister spoke volumes in a most insulting fashion for the exercise of our democratic rights in this Assembly, and I would ask that you would so rule.

Thank you.

3:20

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Norris: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, I have glasses. I've had them since I was 11 years old. I have a habit whenever I sit down of doing this, and they are adjusted on my face on a regular basis. Mr. Chairman, you wear glasses, as do many members. I know that on a hot day like today they have a tendency to slip down on the bridge of your nose.

If that was the indication that you got, I apologize, hon. member. That was not the intent whatsoever of my sitting down and going like this. So I would apologize to the hon. member if he misinterpreted that gesture, but having glasses, which God willed me to

have, I run into that problem all the time. I will attempt not to let that happen in the hon. member's direction in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: I don't really propose to go on debating this particular item. There is a problem in that this has been raised in committee and it's an allegation of something that happened in Assembly and so would have to be dealt with in Assembly. That's the technical way out. The member has apologized for any misinterpretation, whatever gesture was made to adjust glasses or other, that it be noted as just that. But the chair is in an awkward position in saying that it did not occur in committee, so committee cannot deal with it. We're into it before we know. So I think we'll just let it be there. If you wish to bring it up again, hon. member, in Assembly, I guess you could. I think we've had enough debate on this. Have you had enough debate?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

The Chair: If you wish to raise it again or if you wish to accept the apology, fine and dandy. I'm not recognizing either individual. We're in committee, not in Assembly, and committee has no right to make judgments on what happens in Assembly. I can honestly say: I did not see any action like this while in committee.

**Bill 40
Appropriation Act, 2003**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to comment further on the budget as it appears in Bill 40, the Appropriation Act, 2003, in Committee of the Whole, which allows me to go a bit more in depth in discussing the budget that's brought before us as this appropriation bill. There are a number of different issues that I would like to address that have been brought forward to me by constituents and other Albertans who've asked me to either ask questions or put some comments on the record, and I'm happy to do so at this point in time.

The first area is around the budget for Learning and some concerns brought forward. The specific questions are: has the department monitored teacher time off over the last 18 months? My constituent felt that there needed to be close scrutiny of whether there had been an increase in stress leave or time taken off for health reasons related to stress, particularly by examining statistics around whether there had been reported cases of cancer, hypertension, strokes, or heart attacks as reported by members of the teaching and administrative staff employed in the education system from K to 12. Her concerns were particularly raised after she had attended the budget speech.

I should point out that she is an Australian and still has other members of her family living in Australia, adult brothers and sisters. She notes in an e-mail to me that both mother and father are working very hard and giving up some of the luxuries that we enjoy here in Canada because their public education system has deteriorated to a point where they feel that it's necessary to pay to put their children through a private system. Her concern is that the stress that we are putting the education system under could lead us to the situation that they have in Australia. I made note of this because I know that this government has in the past brought forward as a fine example of government a number of the decisions made by the Australian

government and a number of the policies that they put into effect, and this government has been happy to follow those, although I have to say that I don't think that many of them have been very successful. Her concern overall is that we have a good education system here that has been built up through investment over a number of years, that in fact we have built up an equity, if you wish, over those years, and that we have been eroding it since the cuts were brought forward in the '94-95 year.

Now, the Premier likes to talk about a 53 percent increase to the education budget, and indeed that is true if you compare it to the very lowest funding year, which was the '95-96 year. Compared to that, yes, there has been an increase of 53 percent. You actually can get figures through the Department of Learning itself that show different ways to interpret the numbers, and if you factor in things like inflation and other economic factors, we find either 3 percent or an 11 percent increase in funding to education, and that's not balancing it against any increase in enrollment.

So there is a concern that we have a very good system and that we are poised and, some would say, well down the road toward eroding that, and I have to say that that's my take on the system as well. As the child of two teachers, both of them now retired, the differences I see from when they were teaching until now are fairly significant, and I don't want to see us lose any of our standing that we have nationally and internationally, but I think that is a possibility.

This may be a performance measurement that we can look at that tells us whether we have increased stresses that are placed on our staff that are supporting the education system, and I would be interested in whether the department has been tracking that time off, been tracking illnesses as I described. If I could get that information, I think it would serve as an interesting performance measurement. Okay. That's the first issue that was raised with me.

The second issue is around employment standards. I've had an interesting, long-standing issue raised with me by a constituent, and although he doesn't expect his particular situation to be addressed because it's too long ago, he notes that the very situation that caused him grief has not in fact been improved. That's around the ability through the Employment Standards Code to enforce actions against the board of directors of a company.

3:30

So, for example, if the employees are – he uses more colourful language; I'm trying to make it more parliamentary – on the short end of the stick because of an action of the board of directors of a company, that individual employee can't charge the directors with a breach under the Employment Standards Code. It's too difficult to prove that any one of them individually committed the crime or the breach. His case was 13 years ago, and nothing has changed from there. He's suggesting that the Employment Standards Code offences be made strict liability. So if the directors were held jointly and severally criminally liable under the code for acts of the corporation, then the Alberta boards of directors would have their moral and legal concentration focused considerably.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I think there's a lot to that because we know that although wages and Revenue Canada are supposed to be the first money out from a corporation that has declared bankruptcy or been forced into bankruptcy, often there are others that get in there and in fact the employees never see the money. In the case where a company knows that it's treading on eggshells, they may well start to lay people off and not give them severance. Well, then, when those employees try to chase down their legitimate severance paycheques,

the company by then has gone under two or three weeks later and the employee gets nothing and is not even on a list of current employees at the time that the company closed its doors or was forced to close its doors.

That's the sort of context of the situation that we're talking about here. So I'm interested in whether the minister has ever heard of this issue before or the difficulties around being able to make individual directors criminally liable and the difficulty of employees trying to do that and whether any of his staff has ever looked at or investigated the possibility of changing the Employment Standards Code to reflect the situation I've just described.

The next situation is a health issue that was brought to me, and I think that what I'm going to do is just write to the minister about this. She had asked me to raise it in the budget debates. The problem is that this woman had breast cancer. She was able to get breast reconstruction, and of course all of that was covered under health care. Then what's happened to her is that the healthy breast needed to be lifted, and that's not covered under health care, and she was not able to get any kind of funding under that and of course can't afford to do it herself. So the good intentions of the breast reconstruction that was covered by Alberta health care is not able to be followed through because she can't get the additional surgery for the healthy breast. So I will write more details on that one to the minister.

The issue of AISH and what's happening with AISH is of great concern to a number of my constituents. I want to commend the minister and his staff and whatever MLA committee there was that was looking at this one for not combining AISH with the existing programs. We had Bill 32 go through, and thankfully AISH was not included in that, and that was very important to my constituents and, I know, to others. But there continue to be additional stresses that need to be addressed; specifically, removing the medical benefits from the income support, so detaching the medical benefits from the income support.

The point is made that some AISH recipients could earn higher salaries, but they're forced to choose between their medical benefits and earning more employment income, and of course at that point they're always going to opt for the medical benefits. Now, if they could be confident that they could keep their medical benefits indefinitely and return to income support if necessary, some AISH recipients, not all by any means, would move more freely into the workforce, and this is being brought forward by the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. The argument I've just made appears in their February 2003 *Action Notes*. It's certainly an issue that I have seen and dealt with in doing casework for my constituents.

They really need those medical benefits because it can be a lot of money out of pocket for them, particularly if they're trying to find some other kind of holistic approach or they've got over-the-counter medications which are helpful but not covered under the medical benefits. They really need those medical benefits, and they will give up trying to earn a higher income in order to secure those. So I think we're being penny-wise and pound-foolish here. Certainly, I would always be advocating for choice, but I think there's a possibility here to allow some people that are AISH recipients to move more into the workforce if we were able to offer them these medical benefits indefinitely.

The second issue is raising the income exemption levels. British Columbia just raised their exemption levels to \$300, Ontario allows \$160 plus \$140 for work-related expenses, and I think even in Alberta the Premier's council just recommended \$500 a month. I haven't seen any of those changes happening, so I'm hoping that in the context of this budget and in the context of the three-year budget

plan that we've just had put before us from the Department of Human Resources and Employment, the minister can be addressing those three issues, and I look forward to hearing that from him.

The next issue also falls under the Department of Human Resources and Employment, and this is around an experience that a constituent had with the on-the-job training program. Two things in particular he found puzzling, one of which was that they were given a number of forms which were either filled out for them or they were told exactly how to fill out. When they asked why they were doing this as part of this whole job retraining program that was offered by a private provider, they were told that they just had to have this stuff in their files in case the government decided to do an audit.

Of course, that pricked up my ears because the whole issue around private providers providing these job training programs has come under scrutiny I think every year for the last five or six years by the Auditor General exactly for these kinds of reporting problems, tracking, accountability problems. The government has not been strict about monitoring the money that was going out and whether in fact Alberta's citizens were getting value for money in what was being paid in contracts. I think that we all really want people that are going through these programs to be able to get the best benefit from them and re-enter the workforce. We don't want to see money that's misused in any way. So that caused some curiosity from my constituent.

The second part of that is that they asked where the particular program that they were in applied, and they were told: Edmonton and vicinity. Well, it turns out after some investigation by my constituent that that program is offered by different private providers all the way across Alberta, but in fact this particular private provider only offered the program in Edmonton and vicinity, and therefore that's what they told that class. Now, any of those individuals that wanted to move somewhere else in Alberta now believed that they couldn't take the rewards of that class or the references from that class and put them in place anywhere else or they couldn't transfer a file anywhere else in Alberta, which is fairly restrictive and I think by the record was deceptive.

So I think a couple of things. My constituent suggests sending the staff to the sessions incognito to monitor and check that everything is done as it should be and also requiring each provider to give a list of contacts for the training on the job program by community or area and to make sure that these companies mention that any given program is available throughout the province. So that's the issue from that constituent.

There were some questions I did not get the time to ask during the budget debate on Community Development, and I'd just like to put those on the record now. I understand that my time will run out on me eventually, and I'll just try and get another opportunity to speak if I can.

The money to protect and present Alberta's history and culture is up only 4 percent, and this does not reflect an increase for the actual dollars spent in years past. I'm wondering why that is. I think that in some cases the numbers differ if you're going from the forecast or from the actual. Nonetheless, it's not reflective of what has happened in the past.

3:40

Under Ministry Support Services, which appears on page 73, the minister's office is getting about a \$70,000 increase. Could I please get the details on what that money is being used for? Is it staff? Is it decorating of the offices? Is it an increased communication budget? Is it supplies? I'd like the details, please.

I also note under Ministry Support Services that the deputy minister's office is getting a \$13,000 increase. I'd like details on what that \$13,000 is being used for, please.

Strategic corporate services is up by \$1.2 million. Could I please get details on what this increase is for? Again, is it staff; is it supplies and services? I'd like to know exactly what this money is being used for.

Under Cultural Facilities and Historical Resources, on page 77, program support is down by \$17,000. Could I get an explanation as to why this budget has dropped? Was there something extraordinary done the year before that inflated that budget so that in comparison this year appears to have dropped? Why is it reduced? Heritage resource management is up by \$1.4 million, and I'd like to get a breakdown of what the additional money is for.

Now, funding for assistance to the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation is up by a million dollars. In the forecast for '02-03 there was also a line item for \$3.7 million for cultural facilities and historical resources grants, but this does not appear in this year's budget, so could I get an explanation for that? I think we're looking specifically at vote 5.2.2 and 5.2.1, two different votes there but two different things happening. A million dollars up on 5.2.2, but the resource grants have disappeared from vote 5.2.1.

Historic resources fund is down \$1.3 million from last year's budget. That's appearing on page 82. Could I get details on that cut, please?

Of the 23 performance measurements for the department 16 have not been met. Agreed, some of them were not met by a fairly small percentage. Nonetheless, they were not met. The response from the ministry, it appears to me, has been to just rejig the measurements based on a three-year average of the actual results. So, as always, I have some questions about the performance measurement in this department. It doesn't seem to have found a successful solution to this. Almost every year I think they've either changed or there have not been targets set, so we can't measure against it. There's been a different excuse every year I've been examining this budget over seven years, so there are some stresses happening there.

I can't hear, so you're going to have to wave at me.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Centre is expressing concern that it's difficult to hear in the Assembly, so please give her the due courtesy. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. I have to clarify: it's not them; it's me. My ears are plugged because my cold is so bad. So, frankly, even if they were talking, I couldn't hear them. No, it's not the rest of the members. It's myself.

The last issue that I had was on school funding, and I had taken a look at the Oliver school council submission to the Alberta Commission on Learning, and they had been raising a number of issues which I haven't seen particularly discussed or coming forth. One of the issues they had raised was that they feel that we need to teach our students social skills and group skills, noting that the main reason why people are dismissed from positions is not about their inadequate skills but literally their inability to work with other people. So part of what we need to be addressing is getting along with other people, and that needs to partly come through the school system.

Developing a passion for learning in students, encouraging them to ask the right questions, and integrating the arts and physical education . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the budget debate on Bill 40, the Appropriation Act, 2003. At this time there are many issues as one goes through this bill portfolio by portfolio, and I can't help but think that at one time there were 16 portfolios. Certainly, it has grown much larger than that, to 24, even larger than that. At a time when hundreds of teachers, close to a thousand across the province, are being laid off, it's ironic that we still have this large Executive Council expense before us. The last time there were going to be layoffs or retrenchments in this province, there was a reduction in the size of cabinet, and this does not appear to be happening at this time, and I find that quite odd. I suppose it could be summed up by government members as: that was then; this is now.

Particularly in the Learning department there have been issues raised by this hon. member in regard to funding for apprenticeship training at SAIT and NAIT and at various other locations across the province. There is talk of a shortage of young people entering the skilled trades, and I would like to know how much of the \$3.5 billion is being used to ensure that there are classrooms for instruction to take place for those individuals, that there are instructors hired, that the instructors are compensated. Certainly, from what I'm hearing, there have been not only layoffs at the elementary and high school and junior high levels, but there have been retrenchments as well at some of our technological institutions. I would like to know at this time what is being done by this government to ensure that our young people are getting all the training they need to make a positive contribution to the economic well-being of this province with a trade qualification.

Also, if one looks at Community Development, certainly there are still many questions to be answered there. Why did the minister not utilize all of the money budgeted last year for parks and protected areas? There are many ways the extra money, Mr. Chairman, could have been used, like park maintenance and extra park monitoring. Why wasn't the extra \$5 million used in this way? There's a lot of monitoring going on by this government, and I don't know how far the monitoring has gone on in the parks. In parks operations under Community Development funding has increased by roughly \$1.7 million, and where is this money going to, and will this funding increase be permanent? Now, parks operations spent nearly \$1 million less than was budgeted for. What was the reason for this? What spending took place under the line item nominal sum disposals? Why was the nominal sum disposals budgeted for \$4 million last year but nothing was spent? What capital was purchased last year for parks and protected areas for \$1.4 million? What capital is to be bought this year for \$1.3 million?

Also, with the Community Development and the budget, Mr. Chairman, we are indicating here that parks operations revenue is anticipated to increase this year from \$2.8 million to \$4.4 million. What is the ministry anticipating will increase their revenues this much? What assumption is this number based on? Will this be from increased fees or increased attendance? If it is from increased fees, how is this expected to affect attendance? If it is from increased attendance, what marketing or communication plans are going to be used to accomplish this? Are particular parks expected to have more growth than others, and if so, which ones?

3:50

The mission for the ministry states that it strives to preserve Alberta's natural heritage, but there are many examples of the ministry allowing its destruction, such as the Whaleback and the Bighorn. Can the minister reconcile the ministry's mission with its actions?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, certainly, we've heard much in the past about the business plans and how they're going to be reflected not only in various portfolios but being specific again to Community Development. On pages 92 and 93 the ministry faces the challenge of high demands for up-to-date and sophisticated exhibits at various ministry-run centres. As well, it states that the ministry faces the challenges of integrating new information technologies and upgrading or building new infrastructure. What is the ministry doing to face up to these challenges, and when will the process to investigate, identify, and implement steps to increase self-generating revenues be in place? What is the minister's attitude toward increasing user fees at parks and protected areas? Would the department or the minister please elaborate on the performance measures on page 96 of the business plan and explain how visitor satisfaction was determined?

Mr. Chairman, there are other issues which I certainly want to get to in Community Development, and I think I will continue with that, but I have a lot of questions in regard to Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. It is one of the top spending departments of this government, but there are other questions on Community Development that I believe warrant attention.

Now, there have been strategies stating that the Ministry of Community Development wants to "develop an updated parks system plan and strategic direction." This is very similar to what we heard last year in their strategies, to develop a provincial strategy for managing an expanded parks and protected area system with reduced funding. What was the product of last year's strategy? How was last year's strategy different from this year's? What does the ministry mean when it states that it wants to develop a "strategic direction for the management and protection of Alberta's parks and protected areas"? What assumptions will this strategic direction be built upon? What legislation needs to be updated to facilitate management and protection of parks by the ministry? What changes will be made to these pieces of legislation? What new legislation will be brought forward?

Also, the ministry indicates that it wants to go on an education, interpretation, and marketing campaign. Some would describe it as a binge, but I'm going to be gracious and say that it's just a campaign. How much does the ministry plan to spend on this measure? What groups does this ministry plan on targeting for its campaign, and what will be the basic messaging of the campaign?

Also, with Community Development the department wants to make available more volunteer opportunities in the parks. Will these volunteers be replacing paid staff, and what proportion of volunteers of all park staff does the ministry see as being an optimal level?

The budget also indicates that there are going to be priority parks and protected areas. What criteria do priority parks and protected areas meet? Does this mean that the ministry views these parks as more important than the rest? Which areas are viewed by the ministry as being priority? Do priority areas receive more funding and also more attention?

Also, there is an indication that there's a need for a new strategic development for contracting facility operations in parks and protected areas. If the ministry wants a new strategic direction, what is the old strategic direction? What does the ministry plan on changing? What is currently contracted out? What does the ministry wish to contract out in the future? What safeguards has the ministry put in place to ensure service levels are high from contractors, and what type of contract tendering system does the ministry have, and what it is going to do to change it?

Now, I certainly hope I don't have to read about these questions at some point in the future in an Auditor General's report, whether

it's the one coming out this fall or the fall after that, but those questions in regard to Community Development, Mr. Chairman, I think are timely in light of the fact that there is close to \$634 million consumed there.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in Bill 40. [interjection] An hon. member said: let's waste more time. I would certainly disagree with that, Mr. Chairman. This is an appropriate time to have one more look at how this government is spending money. When citizens realize that there has been such a large increase in funding by this government, a 50 percent increase in funding by this government in roughly five years, they want to know that the money is being spent wisely, and the time in this Assembly discussing how tax dollars are being spent is not time that is poorly spent. I think we wouldn't be in the problems we are today with public education and public health care and deficiencies in our energy deregulation schemes, whether they be for natural gas or electricity, if this Assembly spent more time actually debating issues and the merits of issues, the merits of budgets. When one considers that in this session alone we had closure on Bill 3, the Electric Utilities Act; we had closure on Bill 19, an act to deal with natural gas pricing and distribution; we had closure on Bill 27, to deal with labour relations with some of our most precious human resources, and that's our health care professionals; and to add insult to injury, now we have closure on Bill 42, to change the electoral map of this province – so to say that debate in this Assembly is a waste of time is certainly incorrect. [interjection]

Now, if the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont would like to participate in debate, then I would welcome that and sit and listen quietly to his opinion.

The Chair: Hon. member, he has not indicated to me nor have I heard him at this short distance say that he wanted to enter into the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, Mr. Chairman, it's quite clear in the time that I have left that this year's budget is representing a retooling in the way the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is delivering services. It is reflective of the announcements earlier this year that there would be a shift away from ad hoc programs to insurance. Certainly, the department is one of the top spending departments of this government. Actual spending in 2001-2002 was \$737 million, and the 2002-03 forecast is expected to top over \$750 million.

Alberta's agricultural industry has taken many hits over the past few years – there's no doubt about that – several years of drought in many areas of the province, grasshopper infestations, and extraordinary losses in the livestock sectors. There have been international concerns over foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease, and there have been safety concerns expressed with regard to chronic wasting disease on Alberta's game farms. Farmers have also faced international trade issues and sanctions. Last year the U.S. farm bill created many concerns with regard to subsidization of farmers. European countries are very heavily subsidized all the while commodity prices are in significant decline, and this is reflected in, I guess you could call it, farm gate incomes, Mr. Chairman.

4:00

Now, when we look at the budget for agriculture, the minister's office is getting a \$19,000 increase. At this time I would like an explanation of this. Are the offices of the minister being renovated this year? Certainly, we look at some of the district ag offices. A little bit over a year ago it was realized after that budget, Mr. Chairman, that some of those were being closed.

Now, the Standing Policy Committee on Agriculture and Municipal Affairs is getting a modest increase, a \$2,000 increase, for a total of \$104,000. When are we going to see openness and transparency in this process so that Albertans can tell whether or not their money is being well spent? Or, you know, is that \$2,000 the price of muffins and stuff like that – has that gone up? – that is on the table there whenever one enters the standing policy committee meetings? Certainly, not only do the government members get to attend those meetings but members of the public, and there are always muffins and juice and coffee and stuff there. But, now, I don't know what goes on at the closed-door standing policy committee meetings. I don't think it would be any different. Surely, there's no catering of full-course meals going on there.

Communications is getting a \$34,000 increase this year, bringing the total up to \$263,000. Could we get a breakdown of what this increase entails?

Now, the Alberta farm fuel distribution allowance has remained constant over the past few years at \$33.5 million. The Alberta farm fuel distribution allowance is a program which reduces the cost of marked gas or marked fuel by 6 cents per litre. If the line item has stayed the same for the past few years while the number of qualifying producers has changed, is the department looking into reviewing the rate or the total dollars allocated?

A new line item has been added for the farm water program. This is a program that will give farm units up to \$5,000 for projects which increase water supply or tap into new sources of water. How many applications have been received, and how many have been approved, and what areas of the province are the majority of these applications coming from, Mr. Chairman?

Also, the farm income assistance program is one that is designed to pay out a certain dollar amount per acre, per beehive, or per square foot of covered crop to a producer. There was a budgeted amount for this program in 2001-2002 and actual payout amounts of over \$280 million. Although there was no line item amount in the 2002-03 budget, there were payments under the program last year. It is forecasted that over \$333 million, Mr. Chairman, was paid out. This is one of the ad hoc programs that really needs to be evaluated. This year's budget contains no allocated amount for this program. Has the program been scrapped due to new changes in insurance? If not, what is the future of this program going to be? Will it be scrapped in the future? Will we be seeing this again in supplementary estimates later this year? I would imagine that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre will have a great deal to say regarding supplementary estimates.

Now, industry development, Mr. Chairman. Gross dollar amounts for two areas, pork, poultry and dairy and diversified livestock, are down from the 2002-2003 budget slightly. Why? Is the government looking to end the diversified livestock portion of industry development, which includes game animals?

I hope to get a chance to talk about sustainable agriculture in a few minutes in committee as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments and ask some further questions as we consider Bill 40, the Appropriation Act, 2003. When we were in committee, I didn't make any comments or suggestions about some portions of the budget, and I would like to do that now.

The budget has really placed the K to 12 education system under great stress. We've heard in question period for the last month or so the implications of the budget: what that budget is doing to class-

rooms across the province, what it's doing to class size, and what it's doing to the complement of teachers across the province. It's of real concern. One couldn't sit at the press conference held by Edmonton public yesterday and not be distressed by how the budget now is being played out in that school district. We've heard, of course, from two of the other three larger urban districts who are going to be facing if not similar problems to Edmonton public problems that are very close.

I think that one of the unfortunate things that has happened has been the failure of the Department of Learning to establish any standards with respect to class size. I've heard the arguments of the minister, yet against the minister's arguments I put the experience south of the border where almost every state has instituted some form of class size standard, particularly with respect to the primary grades, grades 1 to 3. I think that if those standards had been in place and the resources had been planned to follow them, then we wouldn't have had the kinds of problems that this budget has resulted in.

The whole business of classroom conditions was a huge problem and a huge part of the issue behind the provincewide teachers' strike. Certainly, wages were also an issue, but really it was classroom conditions, as I traveled across the province, that I heard from teachers and teacher group after teacher group that were the driving force behind that strike. The arbitrated settlement looked after the wage concerns but did nothing to address the underlying concerns for classroom conditions. This budget is making those classroom conditions worse for teachers, and more importantly it's making it worse for children to receive the kind of education in the kind of context that we would all wish for.

With respect to Edmonton public I think that this budget actually turns the clock back a number of years, a decade, and wipes out any progress that had been made with respect to the reduction of class size. It's a budget that also draws into question the moves that the government made close to a decade ago in restricting the financial ability of school boards. In the past we wouldn't have found ourselves in this position. Local school boards would have had the ability to find the resources to keep schools operating at least at last year's levels if not improving them. I know that there were some difficulties with discrepancies and inequities across the province in the way that the financial resources for schools were allocated at that time, but it was really a \$30 million problem that could have easily been solved. By taking away any possibility of boards adequately funding their schools and centralizing that authority with the Department of Learning and the government, I think that that action has led to where we find ourselves today. I think the underfunding across the last decade, too, has been a factor, and I think that we were coming to this financial crisis at some point and that the teachers' arbitrated settlement really hurried that climax along. It's going to be very, very stressful.

4:10

The budget allowed for a 2 percent increase in the basic instructional grant, and the reality of school board life these days is that grid creep, the amount of money that boards require each year just to pay for the movement of teachers up the grid, amounts to almost 2 percent alone. The other thing that the boards are faced with is that the arbitrator has wiped out the lowest category for beginning teachers, so that has bumped those teachers up. The result is that the 2 percent in the grants is almost used up before the boards ever start trying to cover the cost of experience increments for teachers. Then to try to accommodate other expenses, to try to accommodate inflation, to try to cover the arbitrated teachers' settlement has just placed them in an impossible position.

I think that the other thing that the government built into the projections for the 2003 calendar year was a 3.7 percent increase due to inflation. If you look at inflation in this area and across the province, inflation has run much higher than that. There was a report from Statistics Canada this morning that inflation in the Edmonton area is now approaching the 9 percent level. Again, that inflationary increase really puts boards who have been given a much lower grant level than that at a serious disadvantage in trying to maintain levels of service that they have and makes it virtually impossible to do anything in terms of improving service.

The transportation grant has increased by 3 percent. Again, the cost increases with respect to fuel – and those cost increases generally exceed the rate of inflation, and it places the boards in an impossible situation. I think that what it does too, Mr. Chairman, is point out the need for a funding formula that looks at the actual costs of delivering service, and that is something that hasn't been done. We seem to be in sort of a judgmental model that each year the Department of Learning looks at the pot of money that might be available and then sits down and writes a budget that fits that. Often, as it was this year, tragically, that pot of money that they've guessed at bears no relation to the real costs that are being faced by school boards. In the case of Edmonton it resulted in 450 teachers being cut.

There is a difference between being cut, Mr. Chairman, and being laid off. The chairman of the board at the news conference yesterday made it abundantly clear that these are not layoffs, that these are teacher cuts, and these teachers will have no contractual connection with the school board as of the coming year, September 1. It's a tragic loss, I think, for the city. I remember the boards when they were talking about hiring new teachers saying that they were going out looking for the Gretzkys of teaching, and here we are seeing the Gretzkys of teaching being left without jobs in the coming year. Again, it's retrograde. It's backward. It's so unnecessary in a province that is as wealthy as we are and has the capacity for doing much better planning.

Another concern with the line item for the Learning department is the concern for children with special needs. I think the budget includes an increase of \$17 million, but that is used to cover the additional costs associated with providing educational services to a growing number of students with severe special needs, and it doesn't provide for any additional per student funding beyond the 2 percent that's there for the basic instructional grant. We all know the huge pressure that has been on boards and on schools in trying to provide adequate service for children with severe special needs and, in fact, all special-needs children, and it's a huge pressure. For parents, if you have youngsters with special needs, it seems that your life is a constant battle with the local schools and school boards trying to marshal and make sure that your youngster gets the kinds of resources that he or she needs, the kind of program that the youngster needs. Even when they get it, even when they have an IPP that meets their needs, that still doesn't guarantee that youngsters will get what has been specified in that plan.

So for special-needs children and their parents this is a budget that again is bad news, and the cuts to classrooms, the increase of classroom size are only going to lead to more difficulties for those youngsters. We're back, I think, to the situation that has been complained about time and time again in this province, that in many cases special-needs children are being warehoused, that they're being placed in classrooms and that's about it. The resources that they need to provide them with adequate programs are just not there.

There is \$17 million for teachers' salary enhancement, and that money is the fund that is used to fund the 2 percent teacher salary enhancement line that was in the budget two years ago from the end

of the fiscal year, March 30, 2003, to the end of the school year, August 31, 2003, and it doesn't represent any new funding.

The technology upgrading fund of \$20 million is a continuation of the grant that we've had of \$43 a student, and if you look across the continent at other jurisdictions and what they're providing in terms of technology for students, this looks very meagre indeed, Mr. Chairman. I looked at some states that are adjacent to our country where \$143 American are being set aside per student to meet the technology demands of schools, the purchase of hardware and software to try to address the evergreening problems that schools have.

There is \$6 million to accommodate enrollment growth, and the key word here is enrollment. It's based on the assumption that enrollment growth will not exceed 0.25 percent, and again it doesn't provide for any additional per student funding.

There was \$20 million in onetime funding for the purchase of textbooks and learning resources, and this is the money that was announced in the throne speech. Again, it really is a credit towards the purchase of materials at the Learning Resources Centre, and in the words of many schools it's not adequate to do what needs to be done.

4:20

There is an attempt again to get back and to try to handle the capital spending, and I think it's with relief that the capital spending announcements have been made by Infrastructure. But it's again a problem when you talk to school boards. Since school buildings have been parceled out to the Department of Infrastructure, boards complain that they really find themselves now having to make pleas to two ministries and that actually it has ended up doubling the work. I think it raises the whole question of whether school buildings should be in the Infrastructure budget or whether they should be in the Learning department budget, where the connection between programs and the kinds of buildings that are needed to house those programs can, I think, best be made. It seems that again it's been an unnecessary increase in bureaucracy and a slowing down of the process. You wonder whose interests are being served by having those decisions made in the Department of Infrastructure.

I think that if you listen to some of the school board complaints across the province, most of them and certainly three of the four large urban school boards would define the situation that we're in as a fiscal crisis. The Public School Boards' Association has estimated that there is a shortfall of about \$250 million to the base funding for K to 12 education, so that base funding is about \$250 million short. There has been another figure used in terms of what would adequately allow the boards to make some progress, and that figure has ranged from \$350 million to \$400 million. So there's a huge shortfall in this budget with respect to what school boards need to carry on, and it is, as I said, leading to a real fiscal crisis in education.

I'm concerned that the approach to this budget, the reaction to what it has meant to schools, has been the calling in of auditors and the promise of the ministry to work with school districts, and I'm not quite sure what that means. Is working with school districts a code for making them toe the line and to deliver services that meet the money that's available? I think that it's something that boards are nervous of.

That being said, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to make a few comments and ask a few questions with respect to comments that the Auditor General had raised in that report. There are still difficulties with the career and technology studies programs with respect to four areas: that the student performance is not being adequately or appropriately assessed, that the access to instruction may not have been provided,

that in some cases duplicate payments have occurred, and that in some cases student transcripts were processed and reported with errors. This has been a problem that's been raised previously. The Auditor General indicates that the steps that have been taken by the ministry and by schools still haven't rectified the problem. The problems surrounding this, I think, have to be straightened out. They are causing schools great difficulty and uncertainty with respect to funding of the CTS programs. The department, I think, made the suggestion that the documentation from the school be made abundantly clear.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 40.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Tannas: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 40.

The Speaker: All members of the Assembly who are in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All opposed, please say no. Concurrence is provided. Thank you very much.

Point of Order Gestures

The Speaker: Before moving on to the next business, when the House moved from its regular format to committee, the chair was in his office and was listening to what had transpired. Right into the committee there seemed to be a matter of some importance raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and the chair also heard the hon. Minister of Economic Development and also heard the ruling given by the Deputy Speaker, who very correctly said that whatever incident there was did not occur in committee, so it should be dealt with in the House per se. In the interregnum period the chair has had a brief discussion with the two members who were just identified and would now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands for a brief statement, and then we'll call on the hon. Minister of Economic Development for a brief statement.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose in committee under section 23 of our Standing Orders, specifically subsection (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I felt that the gesture directed towards the members of the third party after we had failed to give unanimous consent for the motion with respect to the Senate of Canada to be discussed today

was insulting, and I did not accept the explanation by the Minister of Economic Development that he was merely adjusting his glasses. It certainly didn't seem to be a plausible explanation at all, and having discussed it with other members who observed the incident, I think they would agree with me on that matter. So that was what I raised.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development for clarification.

Mr. Norris: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to go on record as saying that I understand the hon. member's concern and that if he understood any of my gestures – physical, verbal, or hand gestures – to be of an offensive nature, I would sincerely like to apologize to him. I would qualify, as I said, that this is an activity where I did not intend to offend him, and I would offer an apology based on that.

4:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that that apology is acceptable. I appreciate it from the hon. minister, and henceforth I will simply view his action as an indication that he believes that I am number one.

The Speaker: Thank you very much to both hon. gentlemen.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Third Reading**

Bill 39

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2003

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will move Bill 39, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a third time]

Bill 42

Electoral Divisions Act

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 42, the Electoral Divisions Act, for third reading.

It's been a long process starting last year with the appointment of an Electoral Boundaries Commission with the members being designated by yourself based on nominations as provided for in the act. The commission itself has had I think a difficult task as always with electoral boundaries because there are many passions involved. Communities have concerns; everybody wants to be well represented; everybody brings those passions to the commission. They held the requisite hearings, and I want to take this opportunity to thank them for the job that they did in bringing forward the report. While each and every member of this House – and we've had discussions in this House both on the resolution affirming the report and now, in second reading, in committee on the bill – can have a viewpoint as to whether or not the job that the commission did with respect to their particular area was appropriate. Each member of the House will have viewpoints with respect to whether the allocation of seats was appropriate. The difficulty is that we each were not on the

commission and we each didn't have the obligation to sit down and take into account the 2001 census as the commission was obliged to do and then consider the other factors which they were required to look at and then take into account any other factors that they may have taken into account.

I can personally recount, Mr. Speaker, that I think I have attended on four boundary commissions and made representations, and I can also accurately recount that in each case I've been disappointed that they didn't take all of my arguments and utilize them in drawing boundaries. This one is no different. The boundaries, had any one of us been on the commission, might have been drawn in different places, but we have to thank them for the work that they. They did their work diligently. They did what they were asked to do. They did it within the context of the parameters that we gave them through the act, and we have to live with the result. The House has addressed some amendments where minor changes could be accomplished within the context of the act and within the ranges of the act and I think have served to improve the result, but I would ask the House now to pass the act on the understanding that it comes into effect on proclamation. In the normal course the act would be proclaimed at the time that the writ was dropped for the next election.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to get the opportunity to speak against Bill 42 in third reading. I have to say with respect that I disagree with most of the comments that the Attorney General and Minister of Justice has used as his reasoning behind these changes, and I think it's important to get on the record why I won't support Bill 42. This is about a principle to me. In reading and reviewing and listening to the live audio, I heard the minister say that we should concur with the report, but I would say that the actions that are inherent in the amendment brought forward put the boot to that concept. There is not concurrence from this government with the report. Either you accept that what was in the Electoral Boundaries Commission report is what is there and it is what it is as written and as put forward or you don't.

Certainly, at the time that we had Government Motion 13 in front of us, a number of members said, "Well, we weren't entirely happy with what was happening," but they were going to accept it. I think some even said that they weren't happy, but they would hold their nose and accept it. Okay. Then accept it. If you don't, then do something about it. Since the Electoral Boundaries Commission itself is dissolved the moment that it presents the report, you can't send it back to that same group of people. You would have to amend the legislation to create a new Electoral Boundaries Commission and refer the report back or ask a new commission to relook at it or do it over again.

So what I see this government doing is having its cake and eating it too. I know that with 74 seats it can do that. Okay. Fine. But I don't think that makes it right, and I can't let this go by without commenting on the record about it because to appear on the surface to concur and then to make significant changes – and in just trying to go through the amendment that was brought forward yesterday and passed, you know, there are something like nine major amendments affecting 27 some odd electoral divisions, and that's just dealing with boundary changes. Then I think there are three or four additional changes around names. So that's not small. I know that in some of the comments that were made, it was: well, we're just going to make minor changes. I think it was talked about being a block or two that could be changed. Well, that's not what's happened here. I mean, in some cases boundaries have been moved

significantly, entire communities gained and lost and moved and kilometres involved in other cases. This is not minor. This is not by a block.

So what the government has done is said: "Oh, yes. We accept what the Electoral Boundaries Commission has said except for that we want a whole bunch of changes, but we're not going to call those actual changes. We're going to call it something else, and we're just going to slide them through." That's just wrong to me. I don't think that these are minor changes. I think that if you feel strongly that those changes need to be made, then do the right thing. Go back, amend the legislation, establish a new Electoral Boundaries Commission, and refer the report to them. But don't pretend that you are upholding what the Electoral Boundaries Commission delivered to this House, because you're not. You've made, as I've just described, 30 some odd changes, and it's not by just a block. They are not minor changes. Thirty some odd changes.

Now, it was put to us by a number of people speaking in favour of this bill and of the amendment that these MLAs were supporting the wishes of their communities. Well, that may well be, but I'm sure it didn't hurt the MLAs either, and I would have to say at that point that okay, then we had a number of individual MLAs satisfying their needs and their communities but not taking a step back and saying: what's the best thing for all of Alberta? Or, more specifically, as an Edmonton MLA: what's the best thing for Edmonton? What we've got here are changes that are almost exclusively, with one exception I think, in Calgary or in rural Alberta.

Mr. Hancock: Because you didn't co-operate.

Ms Blakeman: I'm not going to co-operate with this, because this is a perversion of accepting the report that was put in front of us. If the report was fine, then accept it and accept it in its entirety. I think it's a perversion of the process to accept it and then to make 30 some odd changes that are not minor changes, and I won't play that game. I don't think it's right.

4:40

You know, I even heard arguments used to support both sides. The Electoral Boundaries Commission was not allowed to consider changes that happened in the population after the 2001 census, but as I listened to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice with his arguments to support the amendments yesterday, for one of the amendments he used the argument that rapid growth was justifying the changes in the boundary. Well, you can't have it both ways. If the Electoral Boundaries Commission wasn't allowed to accept that argument and use it in a number of cases, then what makes it okay and acceptable to use it in one case? If you were going to allow it in the one case, then you have to go back and allow it in every other case and send it back to the Electoral Boundaries Commission and go: "Okay. We do accept the argument that there's been significant population change, and you need to take it into account."

But that's not what happened here. We had individual changes happen, lobbied for by individual MLAs. That, frankly, is when you come down to the concept of gerrymandering, and that is what happened here. We had MLAs making changes to boundaries. There were lots of arguments when we first heard Government Motion 13 to accept the Electoral Boundaries Commission report that it's not up to MLAs to change boundaries and that if MLAs were changing boundaries, then it was gerrymandering. Then – what is it? – a month later we have MLAs changing boundaries and agreeing amongst themselves to change boundaries.

So my position is, as I've stated, that if you were not going to accept that report in its entirety, then you should send it back to do

the right thing. What I've seen is individual MLAs gaining here, but I have seen Alberta as a whole lose and particularly Edmonton as a whole lose. So I saw successful lobbying from the Calgary caucus, successful lobbying from the rural caucus. I have to assume it was not successful lobbying from the Edmonton caucus because there were no changes about it losing a seat for Edmonton. I didn't see a campaign – now, obviously it was behind closed doors – mounted to keep that seat in Edmonton, and I just frankly think that's wrong. [interjection]

Well, once again I'm being heckled that we lost. The government has 74 seats. The opposition has seven plus two in the third party. Yeah, you can keep throwing that argument at me. You're reflecting 90 percent of the vote in the seats that the government caucus has, and that does not reflect the popular vote. So right there you've got a problem.

I think that if that many changes are required, then the report itself is flawed and it should be rejected. I don't think it's given to the government caucus to play behind closed doors with maps so that the Calgary caucus and the rural caucus MLAs get what they want and Edmonton doesn't and doesn't have a strong voice there.

I have to also say that I'm really disappointed in the timing of this. There was informal notice given during the week of May 5 to 9 that this was being considered with all of these changes. The Official Opposition caucus received a formal letter dated May 7 asking for changes by May 12, and included in that was a weekend. That's not enough time to go out to all the communities in Alberta and everyone that we talked with. I mean, for heaven's sake, the Electoral Boundaries Commission itself spent something like seven months consulting in Alberta, and all of a sudden now there's going to be a five-day turnaround, which is really only three working days. That's just not acceptable.

I mean, I believe that the government has gerrymandered here. I think it has taken advantage of its large majority. I vehemently reject the arguments that I've heard in support of these boundary changes. They are not minor, and if there were that many of them needed, then the Electoral Boundaries Commission report should have been rejected because it was obviously not acceptable.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In regard to Bill 42 and the amendments to Bill 42 that have been presented to the Assembly for various areas of the province, to say the least it is interesting, but at the same time I would view these as certainly not just housekeeping changes. I don't understand the process. There was a community organization, in this case the Francophone community in the areas of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Mill Creek, and Edmonton-Strathcona, who certainly expressed an interest in having the community represented in this Assembly, as much of it as possible, in one constituency. That was not done. It's not that this member wouldn't do it. This member did not want to participate in the process that, quite frankly, is, to say the least, a poor reflection of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It's certainly a poor reflection of that when one hears sitting in the Assembly that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview states – and it's on the record, Mr. Speaker – that if anyone has any concerns regarding the bill, Bill 42, please take those concerns to the hon. Minister of Justice and the provincial Attorney General.

Now, when we look at that process and the suggestion that occurred in the Assembly some weeks past and we look at the public hearings that are suggested in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, the commission must hold public hearings before its report is

submitted to you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly after its report has been made public “at the places and times it considers appropriate to enable representations to be made by any person as to the area and boundaries of any proposed electoral division and that “the Commission shall give reasonable public notice of the time, place and purpose of any public hearings held by it.” There were no public hearings involved in these amendments, at least not that I’m aware of. There was certainly notice, if we can call it that, given in the Legislative Assembly, but there was no notice given to the public. Certainly, there would be other groups that would be interested in the proposed boundaries, but were they given their chance? I don’t know.

In the last couple of weeks I’ve certainly seen electoral maps in the Assembly. I’ve seen various members with the interim and the final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the proposed electoral division areas, boundaries, and names. I don’t know what went on. Mr. Speaker, when we consider what has happened here and we consider what has happened to the city of Edmonton, I would like to bring to the attention of the Assembly the letter that was copied to the Leader of the Official Opposition – I tabled it earlier in the Assembly – and this is a letter that was sent to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General on May 14 from the mayor of the fine city of Edmonton, His Worship Bill Smith. This letter states:

I was advised today that Bill 42, the Electoral Divisions Act, received first reading in the Legislature on May 8, 2003. I urge you to reconsider adopting the boundaries as established by the Commission. Edmonton’s influence will undoubtedly suffer as a result of passage of this legislation. The Commission’s recommendation for the seat distribution is clearly flawed as it does not reflect the population increase in Edmonton, nor the continuing growth of Alberta’s major urban centre.

[The hon. Premier] is on record as stating that “I don’t know if we can come up with anything better.” The 21st Century will see urban centres as the foundation of economic growth in a global economy, and this reality should be a priority for the Commission in boundary distribution. To have the loss of a seat in Edmonton is totally contradictory to this principle – any other seat distribution that reflects this would be better. Since the future of the Alberta economy will be contingent on the strength of Edmonton and its urban priorities, our political voice in the Legislature is imperative.

The Premier’s decision not to allow a free vote on the recommendations of the Commission suggests the divisiveness of your own caucus, and should therefore reflect the fact that your caucus is not comfortable with the boundaries as drawn up. I implore you not to ignore the opposition to Edmonton’s loss of voice.

Yours truly,

Bill Smith

Mayor [city of Edmonton].

4:50

When we look at Edmonton and Edmonton’s population, it’s been recognized in this Assembly and outside that it has grown substantially since the 2001 census and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. In eight years, when the act states that the next Electoral Boundaries Commission sits, there will be dramatic changes that will have to be made to Alberta’s electoral boundaries. Now, according to Economic Development Edmonton, in 2001 the population grew by 4.5 percent, exceeding Conference Board of Canada forecasts. This is in addition to the 8.7 percent growth reflected by the 2001 census.

The argument has been made inside and outside this House that the boundary commission is confined or restricted or limited by the 2001 Canada census results. Page 6 of the final report to you, Mr. Speaker, states:

In determining population, the Act (Section 12(1)) requires the Commission to use “the most recent decennial census of population referred to in section 19(3) of the Statistics Act (Canada)”

plus other measures, it goes on to state. But that’s the census that has to be used.

Now, the 2001 Canada census resulted in an Alberta population of slightly less than 3 million, but here we have the proposed amendments to the Electoral Divisions Act that have been presented to this House, and the same that restricts Edmonton does not apply, unfortunately, to the city of Calgary. We look at this three-column document that was presented, and the proposed amendments to the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission shift the proposed boundary between Calgary-Hays and Calgary-Egmont so that the entire community of Riverbend falls within Calgary-Egmont. Affected constituencies, naturally, are Calgary-Egmont and the new constituency of Calgary-Hays. The rationale for amendments in this case reunites the community of Riverbend into one constituency. Calgary-Hays is a new constituency with a low population but has grown by 4,500 homes since 2001.

So why is Edmonton being penalized for the growth that’s occurred since the 2001 census? This does not seem to apply anywhere else. Forty-five hundred homes, Mr. Speaker, is probably close to 8,000 if not 9,000 voters, maybe even greater than that. Who’s to say? This growth has been identified since 2001 in this three-column document that’s been presented by the government here. I just think that it flies in the face of what is in the interim and in the final report. If one city has to stick to the 2001 census, why does not another area of the province have to follow that as well?

I will be surprised, Mr. Speaker, if Bill 42, the Electoral Divisions Act, does not at some time wind up challenged in the courts. This process has developed, and it has been followed. I don’t think it is in the spirit or reflection of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It remains to be seen whether it will satisfy the interests of all Albertans, not only those in Edmonton who have lost a voice and, in my view, have a lost a voice unfairly in this report. Certainly, we’re going to have to live with this report. There have been significant changes to the electoral map in this city. There have been significant changes to the individual map of Edmonton-Gold Bar. But I cannot see how this whole process can be called fair to the voters and to the citizens of this province.

Calgary because of their economic growth certainly warrants and merits three constituencies. There’s been dramatic growth there – no one is denying that – but Edmonton does not deserve to lose a seat. In fact, if we look at population data like is being looked at in the three-column document in regard to Calgary, then Edmonton should have 20 seats, not 18.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) does take effect now. If anyone wants to participate before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods – unless he’s choosing to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments at third reading of the Electoral Divisions Act we have before us, Bill 42. If you go back to the legislation that governed the report that we had in the Assembly, I think it’s clear from the legislation that there has been an attempt to rule out politics and the influence of political parties and politicians in drawing the electoral boundaries. That attempt is consistent with what has happened historically. In the 19th century I think it was pretty well the pattern that legislators controlled and drew up the electoral

boundary maps. Since that time the reforms have been in the direction of removing politics from the redistricting process, and the powers of the Legislatures have been drastically or dramatically cut. In most countries, I think, the history or an examination would tell us that the Legislature plays only a very limited role or in fact no role at all in redistricting or redrawing boundaries.

Some, like ours, still require the plan, once it's put forward, to come back to the Legislature for approval, but others don't require any such process and, in fact, once they're completed, are law. Some countries and some jurisdictions allow debate, as we do, and some delay, but in most of those jurisdictions they are not allowed to in any way modify the plan. I think that that is one of the major reasons why we're upset with the bill.

The other and most important one, of course, is that the city of Edmonton lost a seat, and there seems to have been no way in the process for that part of the plan to be revisited or to be amended so that that didn't occur. We've made those arguments previously in the House. So I guess at third reading, when we're looking at the principles, we have to ask how consistent we have been with respect to not having the Legislature or politicians interfere with the plan. It's the view of our party that the amendments that were introduced and passed violate that principle and move us in a direction that is not consistent with what is happening elsewhere and, I think, is not consistent with the view of most Albertans. Just the mere fact that we allow our Legislature to accept or reject a plan creates some question and opens the whole process up to the charge of political bias. Again, I think that's unfortunate. Not only having that authority but also having the authority to amend it, as was done yesterday, the day before, in this Legislature really does open the door to that criticism that there is interference politically with the report.

5:00

There have been a number of schemes that have been put in place to try to handle the problem, and I think it also should be noted that simply ignoring politics doesn't mean that you end up with an unbiased report, even when they are prepared by independent commissions. There have been instances where they unintentionally ended up favouring one political group or another. So having a nonpartisan, independent group do the boundaries doesn't guarantee that they are going to be unbiased, but the likelihood, I think, of them being unbiased is more likely to happen if it is done by an independent group who make the final plan and that plan has to be accepted.

I think that with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude. Again, it was unfortunate that the amendments that were brought forward were allowed to proceed. I think that it weakens the report. Certainly, in the eyes of many Edmontonians they will see this as a bias against the city where their concerns over the loss of a seat were not dealt with but where concerns elsewhere in the province were handled through an amendment process, even with the restrictions that were supposedly put on that amending process.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, hon. members. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Mr. Masyk: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all know when it personally affects a person on electoral boundaries. However, the fact does remain that, you know, the process and the show must go on. The citizens of Edmonton will actually speak in the next election by where they're going to put their X at the poll, and if they don't accept that deeply about losing a seat, it'll be reflected in the

election. If we don't do our jobs as MLAs, we won't be elected. It doesn't matter what party you're in.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Electoral Boundaries Commission, in my opinion of course, could have done a better job. However, the majority of the people will vote, and we'll accept it and live with it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: For clarification, the hon. member was participating under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Masyk: Right.

The Speaker: Okay. The chair just wants to make sure that no additional member wants to participate before calling on the hon. Government House Leader.

The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. speaker. Just a few comments that were elicited by the speeches this afternoon. Edmonton-Centre commented on the Electoral Boundaries Commission not being allowed to use numbers other than the census. Of course, that's entirely incorrect. The Electoral Boundaries Commission has to take into account the census numbers but then could take into account any other factors that they thought were relevant. So if other numbers had been presented to them that were credible, they could have taken them into account. They were under no compulsion not to take into account other numbers, so that statement has to be corrected.

The question that the hon. member was trying to suggest that some members were more successful in lobbying than other members totally ignores what's happened since the Electoral Boundaries Commission came into effect and their report was tabled, and that is that many communities then started writing to say: when the bill is considered, we want you to consider these concerns. MLAs didn't start that process. Communities started that process, as is normal after a boundaries commission reports. Some of those concerns can be taken into account, and this House took those concerns into account because they were within the philosophy and the context of the report. It wasn't in this House's hands to change the report, but it could take into account those minor changes. Now, the fact that the Liberals chose not to assist their communities in some cases by taking a look at that – for example, in Edmonton-Gold Bar there was a concern . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, are you rising on a point of order?

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I am. I'm standing on a point of order, and that would be under 23(h) and (i).

The Speaker: Okay. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: I think that just to make the assumption, the leap to make the allegation towards members of the Liberal caucus that we were not willing to come forward for our communities is erroneous. None of us have ever stated that. As a matter of fact, a number of us have spoken on the record of our concern for our communities. So under 23(h) to make the allegation against the Liberal caucus that we weren't concerned about our communities is erroneous. In addition, to put any kind of motive upon us as to whether we were willing to

come forward or not on behalf of communities – again he has no information on which to be basing that.

The Speaker: On this point of order, the Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry if I've offended the hon. member by bringing it too close to home. I will withdraw those remarks and rephrase them.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, would that be appropriate?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I accept the withdrawal.

The Speaker: The matter is closed. Continue your debate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I proceed, might I ask – and I don't want to cede the floor, so if I have to cede the floor to do it, you can tell me that – for unanimous consent of the House, in the event that there's a standing vote and we go past 5:30, to be allowed to come back after that to move a motion of adjournment so that we can adjourn to 1:30 p.m. tomorrow instead of to 8 tonight, as we normally would?

The Speaker: The hon. member has 15 minutes maximum to participate in third reading. Twenty-two minutes shy of the clock the minister has already spoken for a number of minutes, and he anticipates that he'll be going beyond 5:30?

Mr. Hancock: No, but I don't want to lose the opportunity.

The Speaker: Well, okay. This is in great harmony because it's the 14th day of May. The floor will not be ceded. The Government House Leader still retains his position on the floor. He's asked an interesting statement. We'll deal with it because it's harmony and it's May 14. The request is that should the procedure go beyond 5:30, we will ignore the clock. That is essentially the question. We will require unanimous consent to do that, but one would have to have some understanding that we're not talking about just letting the clock go till 12:30 or something. Just to conclude the normal business. I say that because once I asked for unanimous consent as minister of the environment. It was given to me, and I spoke for two hours, and I got in a lot of trouble after that.

So would the House consider providing unanimous consent for the procedure to continue should it go past 5:30?

[Unanimous consent denied]

Mr. Hancock: We may end up coming back at 8 o'clock.

An Hon. Member: Well, sit down, and then we don't have to.

Mr. Hancock: No. I can't just sit down, because there were some comments that were made that are inappropriate from my perspective.

There are communities which did want to have the opportunity to have minor adjustments in Edmonton. Unfortunately, we were not able to accommodate that because one of the criteria was that we sit down and concur with the process, and some members of the House would not sit down and concur with any processes, and I'll leave it at that.

5:10

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar read a letter from the mayor of the city. I just want to make sure that it's on the record that in September of 2002 I had a conversation with the mayor of the city after he was advocating, after the interim report, that Edmontonians call their MLAs about electoral boundaries. I had a conversation with the mayor, and I indicated to him that it was appropriate for Edmonton city council and the mayor to ask Edmontonians to go to the commission before the final report and make representation to the commission, and I encouraged him to have an advertising campaign at that time to encourage Edmontonians to do that. The Edmonton city council and the mayor did not do that, in fact waited for the final report before they started advertising and wasting my money as an Edmonton taxpayer at a time when it wasn't effective. So I needed to have that on the record.

There are many other comments that I could refute with respect to the debate from the opposition, but the fact of the matter is that the process has been fair. It hasn't always had the result that everybody wanted, but we have a result. The concept of doing minor adjustments – and I believe they are minor adjustments – to reunite communities was appropriate. Everybody had the opportunity to participate; some chose not to. It wasn't a closed-door process. It was entirely open, and I asked all members of the House for their participation long before May 5. Those that chose not to participate in that process didn't participate in the process, but they can't complain about not having had the opportunity.

The other thing I'd like to say quickly is that there was mention of the Francophone community, and that was brought to my attention. I tried very, very hard to put together an amendment which would work, but it would have required a significant change. It could have still been accommodated if all members who had an interest in that area were prepared to sit down. At my invitation one, the person who brought it to my attention, did not, and therefore I could not accommodate by bringing forward an amendment of that nature, but that member could have if he'd so desired.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that, I would ask that we have a vote and move on.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:13 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Graham	McClelland
Ady	Haley	McFarland
Amery	Hancock	Norris
Broda	Herard	Rathgeber
Cao	Hlady	Renner
Cenaiko	Horner	Shariff
Danyluk	Jablonski	Snelgrove
DeLong	Jacobs	Stelmach
Doerksen	Jonson	Strang
Dunford	Klapstein	Tarchuk
Evans	Lord	Taylor
Friedel	Lougheed	VanderBurg
Fritz	Lund	Vandermeer
Gordon	Marz	Zwozdesky
Goudreau	Masyk	

Against the motion:

Blakeman

MacDonald

Massey

Bonner

Mason

Pannu

Totals:

For – 44

Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:25 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

