

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, February 11, 1997 1:30 p.m.

Date: 97/02/11

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Would members please remain standing after the prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pause at the beginning of this fifth session of the 23rd Legislature to express our thanks for the blessings of friends and family and to reflect upon the good memories of those loved ones who have passed from our midst.

Guide us in all our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta.

We pray especially for this province, for the Lieutenant Governor, and for the Legislative Assembly at this time assembled that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavours upon the best and surest foundations that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety may be established among us for all generations.

Amen.

As is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. This afternoon I would like to welcome members of the Adair family, who are present in the Speaker's gallery.

**Mr. J. Allen "Boomer" Adair**  
May 13, 1929, to December 24, 1996

THE SPEAKER: On December 24, 1996, J. Allen "Boomer" Adair passed away. Mr. Adair represented the constituency of Peace River for the Progressive Conservative Party. He was first elected in the 1971 general election and was re-elected in 1975, 1979, 1982, 1986, 1989, and served until 1993. During his years of service he served as minister without portfolio responsible for northern development, 1971-75; minister of recreation, parks and wildlife, 1975-79; minister of tourism and small business, 1979-86; minister of consumer and corporate affairs, February to May of 1986; Minister of Transportation and Utilities, 1986 to 1992; and minister responsible for the Northern Alberta Development Council, 1986-92.

**Mr. Leighton Edward Buckwell**  
November 28, 1918, to January 2, 1997

THE SPEAKER: On January 2, 1997, Mr. Leighton Edward Buckwell passed away. Mr. Buckwell was first elected in the 1967 general election, was re-elected in 1971, and served until 1975, representing the constituency of Macleod for the Social Credit Party. During his years of service he served on the following select standing committees: Municipal Law and Law Amendments, Private Bills, Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, Public Affairs, and Public Accounts. He also served on the following special committees: Assessment and Taxation, Communal Use of Land, Professions and Occupations, and Redistribution/Redistribution Procedure.

**Mr. Bohdan J. D. Stefaniuk**  
August 15, 1937, to September 17, 1996

THE SPEAKER: A former Table officer, Mr. Bohdan J.D. Stefaniuk, passed away on September 17, 1996. Mr. Stefaniuk was appointed Clerk of the Legislative Assembly in 1976 and served until 1987.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember these persons as you have known them.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege to present a petition signed by Albertans who are calling for the maintenance of Kananaskis Country in a natural state.

I have the additional privilege of presenting a second petition signed by 755 Albertans that calls for the creation of a wild land provincial park to protect the Kananaskis and Spray River valleys.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition signed by 255 Albertans. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation which would remove domestic abusers from the home and make the abuser financially responsible for his/her action.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table a petition that reads:

We the undersigned petition the Assembly to urge the government to eliminate all Video Lottery Terminals in Alberta and thereby prevent the devastation they are causing to the lives of people, families, and communities.

Signed by 25 people in Grand Centre.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a petition signed by 399 Calgarians demanding that the Calgary General hospital remain open and fully operational as a hospital servicing the needs of the inner city.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this afternoon to introduce a petition on behalf of 99 people in the county of Lethbridge who are protesting the new assessments that are being taken on county property and asking that the county be given the flexibility to assess similar to the urban municipalities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 617, mostly Calgarians, demanding that the Calgary General hospital, the Bow Valley site, remain open and

fully functional as a hospital servicing the needs of the inner city in the city of Calgary.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to present a petition on behalf of 185 Edmontonians, and they petition the Assembly as follows:

We the undersigned, residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government of Alberta to review and revise procedures for eligibility requirements for financial subsidy under the Capital Region Housing Corporation.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MR. ZWOZDESKEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice that pursuant to Standing Order 40 later today I shall rise again to present a motion which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize February 10 through 16 as Random Acts of Kindness Week and congratulate Colleen Ring as the chair of the Random Acts of Kindness Week Committee and all the volunteers associated with [this international event.] Thank you.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I move that written questions and motions for return appearing on today's Order Paper will be ordered to stand and retain their places on tomorrow's paper.

1:40 **Introduction of Bills**

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

**Bill 201  
Ombudsman Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Ombudsman Amendment Act, 1997.

Bill 201 seeks to expand the role of the Ombudsman to include upon request a review of decisions of the Law Society of Alberta.

[Leave granted; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

**Bill 202  
Provincial Court Amendment Act, 1997**

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 1997.

This Bill is allowing grandparents access rights to their grandchildren and has the support of the Canadian Grandparents' Rights Association.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 202 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Bill 203  
Citizen's Initiative Act**

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. I request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Citizen's Initiative Act.

This will allow a direct step for the citizens of Alberta for direct democracy.

[Leave granted; Bill 203 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Bill 204  
Health Care Accountability and Entitlement Act**

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a Bill being the Alberta Health Care Accountability and Entitlement Act, Bill 204.

This Act will enshrine the principles of the Canada Health Act in Alberta legislation, will create a health care ombudsman – and we certainly need one of those – and will prohibit in law private billing by clinics which are receiving public funding.

[Leave granted; Bill 204 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

**Bill 205  
School Amendment Act, 1997**

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, being the School Amendment Act.

The purpose of this Bill would be to change the funding for children attending a private school to reflect the 75 percent of total instructional funding that public school children receive now.

[Leave granted; Bill 205 read a first time]

**Bill 206  
Kananaskis Park Act**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce the Kananaskis Park Act, Bill 206.

This Act will create the Kananaskis area as a park and prohibit further commercialization, further commercial development in that area so that we can protect and preserve it for generations to come. We don't have to pave everything in this province.

[Leave granted; Bill 206 read a first time]

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

**Bill 207  
Hospitals Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Bill 207, the Hospitals Amendment Act, 1997.

This Bill would change the Hospitals Act to allow a mother of a newborn baby not to be discharged from a hospital prior to 48 hours without her consent or the consent of her physician.

[Leave granted; Bill 207 read a first time]

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

**Bill 208  
Lotteries (Video Lottery Schemes Elimination)  
Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to

introduce a Bill being Bill 208, the Lotteries (Video Lottery Schemes Elimination) Amendment Act, 1997.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, would do the honourable thing for Albertans and remove the video lottery terminals.

[Leave granted; Bill 208 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

**Bill 209  
Domestic Abuse Act**

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave this afternoon to introduce Bill 209, titled the Domestic Abuse Act.

This Bill is intended to provide expeditious protection to spouses under assault and also streamline the process to implement this protection, Mr. Speaker.

[Leave granted; Bill 209 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

**Bill 210  
Occupiers' Liability Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 210, being the Occupiers' Liability Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill would be to allow a landowner to erect a sign indicating that visitors are welcome to enter onto the land but the owner of the land is not liable for their activities unless the owner of the land conducts his business in a willful or reckless manner.

[Leave granted; Bill 210 read a first time]

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

**Bill 211  
Off-highway Vehicle Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being Bill 211, Off-highway Vehicle Amendment Act, 1997.

This Bill will require those operating a snow vehicle to be wearing a helmet.

[Leave granted; Bill 211 read a first time]

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

**Bill 212  
Lobbyists Registration Act**

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 212, being the Lobbyists Registration Act.

In the spirit of an open and accountable government, lobbyist registration in legislation will enhance that commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Leave granted; Bill 212 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

1:50

**Bill 213  
Non-Smokers' Health Act**

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Non-Smokers' Health Act, Bill 213.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third time I've stood in this Assembly with the same Bill, and once again it is designed to put the provincial government at the forefront in the battle against smoking.

[Leave granted; Bill 213 read a first time]

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

MRS. FRITZ: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I thought that this Bill had . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: It's the one you were told to read.

MRS. FRITZ: Actually, it's the one I wrote. I'm pleased that I get to introduce it.

**Bill 214  
Amusements Amendment Act, 1997**

MRS. FRITZ: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 214.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, is the access to adult videos by minors. It's a Bill that I have discussed in the Legislature before through Notices of Motion, and what this Bill is looking at doing is having owners of video stores not being allowed to rent adult videos to minors.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 214 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

**Bill 215  
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 215, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1997.

The purpose of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, would be to implement the reports of the Tupper report and the Wachowich commission earlier this year.

[Leave granted; Bill 215 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Bill 216  
Parental Responsibility Act**

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being Bill 216, the Parental Responsibility Act.

Mr. Speaker, this will allow young offenders' victims to have some recourse in regards to actions.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 216 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Bill 217**  
**Disaster Services Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill would allow the designation of land as a flood plain and thereby take the onus off Alberta taxpayers to pay for damages to buildings and structures where people have knowingly built on flood plains.

[Leave granted; Bill 217 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

**Bill 218**  
**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1997**

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to introduce Bill 218, Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1997.

This Act clearly states that each pension paid pursuant to this Act shall, on January 1, 1998, be reduced by 5 percent of the amount that exceeds \$24,000 and thereafter on January 1 of every following year be reduced by a further 5 percent on the amount that exceeds \$24,000 until the Provincial Treasurer tables in the Legislative Assembly a report pursuant to the Balanced Budget and Debt Elimination Act indicating that Crown debt is retired. This will bring fairness and fiscal responsibility to those who created the debt.

[Leave granted; Bill 218 read a first time]

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

**Bill 219**  
**Crown Contracts Dispute Resolution Act**

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 219, being the Crown Contracts Dispute Resolution Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Act provides for a mediation process in the event of disputes between a third party contract and the government.

[Leave granted; Bill 219 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

**Bill 220**  
**Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 1997**

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 220, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 1997, proclaiming ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta.

[Leave granted; Bill 220 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to

table with the Assembly the annual report of the Public Service Commissioner. It's for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1996.

2:00

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

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several annual reports that I beg leave to table in the Assembly today: the 1995-96 annual report for the Athabasca University Foundation, 1995-96 University of Alberta Foundation report, 1995-96 University of Calgary Foundation, 1995-96 University of Lethbridge Foundation, 1995-96 Public Colleges Foundation of Alberta, 1995-96 Non-profit Private Colleges Foundation, 1995-96 Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, 1995-96 Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development annual report.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to table a letter today to Colleen Ring, chair of the Random Acts of Kindness Committee in Edmonton, expressing our appreciation of the work of her and her committee in promoting Random Acts of Kindness Week from February 10 to 16 in our community.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table four letters, one each to the four Albertans who won a title at the Canadian figure skating championships in Vancouver this week: first, to Sarah Schmidek, junior ladies' champion, who is from Jenner - for those of you who may not be aware of where Jenner is, it's in Bow Valley constituency - Susan Humphreys, senior ladies' champion, of Edmonton; Leah Hepner, novice ladies' champion, of Calgary; and Chad Kilburn, novice men's bronze medal winner, of Edmonton.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a report called "Are You Better Off?" which reflects answers to my survey that I've received from over 100 respondents in the past week, showing that approximately 70 percent of these respondents feel they are not better off today, unfortunately, than they were four years ago in terms of jobs and income, health care, education, communities, and seniors' issues.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table four documents, documents with ideas, vision, values, and policy for the future of this province. It's our speech to the throne. It's the real speech to the throne.

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling four copies of maps that will define the area that we will designate as Kananaskis park, an area within which there will be no further commercialization of those outstanding, remarkable natural resources there.

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table four copies of an information pamphlet sent out to Albertans from the opposition caucus labeled with a very catchy title: what have your Liberal MLAs done for you lately? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, order.

We'll have now a nice quiet tabling by the Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: I hope I can accommodate you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a few documents, Mr. Speaker. It's been a while since

I've been able to present this correspondence in the House. First, is a letter to the Premier from Margaret Louise Morgan. Mrs. Morgan is one of the 15,000 Albertans who lost their jobs as a result of unplanned budget cuts to the health care system, and she wants an answer from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the second is a letter from a constituent who is very concerned that they had to go to not one, not two, but three different hospitals across two different health care regions before they could receive treatment for a broken bone. They ended up with a \$1,400 ambulance bill just because they happen to live in the wrong place at the wrong time because of what this government has done to the health care system.

The last documents that I'd like to table with the Assembly are four copies of the quarterly update on physician resources in Alberta for the three-month period ended December 31, 1996. This was prepared by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and what it concludes is that this year alone there has been a net loss after all the new registrations of 112 physicians from this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table four copies of a summary of calls to the Alberta Liberal caucus VLT hot line indicating over 2,000 calls: 87.4 percent calling for a total ban, 5.7 percent for a partial ban.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table on behalf of parents in the city of Fort Saskatchewan 101 letters asking the government to please fund fully all technologies so that there is equity and fairness to all students in the province of Alberta.

I would like at this time on behalf of teachers in the province of Alberta to table 582 copies of letters addressed to Premier Klein with regards to the stress level in the classroom and the teacher/student ratio. I'd ask that he receive them to be read. They're bedtime reading for the Premier, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, to my right they're very talkative and sounding exceedingly arrogant. I hope that my constituents will take note of what you're saying.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two documents as well. The first is the results of a survey that was conducted in my constituency in which health care, education, and employment or the lack thereof were concerns for the constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The second is a document that was put together in response to the concerns that my constituents had with health care. It's called Know Your Rights! A Guide to Our Health Care. Perhaps if this government and its members did endorse the principles of the Canada Health Act, we wouldn't have to have a document such as this.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I'm pleased to table

with the Assembly the 19th annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer. A copy of the report was distributed to Members of the Legislative Assembly on December 23, 1996.

Also, hon. members, I'd table with the Assembly the report of the Ethics Commissioner dated November 21, 1996. The report is with respect to the investigation involving the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod. A copy of the report was distributed to members on November 25, 1996.

Hon. members, I also wish to table with the Assembly the report of the Ethics Commissioner dated December 19, 1996. The report is with respect to the investigation into the allegations involving the hon. the Premier. A copy of the report was distributed to members on December 19, 1996.

I also have the honour of tabling with the Legislative Assembly pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act the following: Members' Services order 1/96, being Records Management Order No. 1.

## 2:10 Introduction of Guests

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two introductions I'd like to make today. First, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry it's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 90 bright young students from St. Matthew school. They are accompanied today by their teachers Mr. Karpa, Mrs. Synenko, and Mrs. Gionet, and I believe as well that Mrs. O'Flaherty, a parent, is with them. They are seated in both the public and the members' galleries, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the welcome of this House.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My second introduction is a young woman from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, a remarkable young woman with a very bright future. She is here today to watch politics in action. It's my privilege to introduce Tannis Berg, who is also an excellent campaigner, and she's going to get to put those talents to use very soon. Please stand and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 59 students from Madonna school in Sherwood Park. They are accompanied this afternoon by teachers Mr. Bruce Plante, Ms Connie Poschmann, and Ms Nicole Dittaro and parents Ms Angela Meters and Ms Bev Zadimersky. They are seated in the member's gallery, and I'd ask that they stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of introducing today a young woman who is sitting in the visitors' gallery. Her name is Lorian Taylor. She's from Medicine Hat; however, she now lives in Edmonton. We want to bring some attention to the fact that she has just completed an honours bachelor of science degree at the University of Guelph. And, yes, this is Dr. Taylor's daughter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I'd like to introduce a young man in the visitors' gallery, Mr. Speaker. His name is Cameron Roset, and he's from Medicine Hat. He's a student at the University of Alberta and a good Conservative, and he will be marrying my daughter in August.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, I would just like at this time to introduce a guest in our gallery today. He is the husband of one of our members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. His presence here today indicates and shows the support that we all need from our families. I'd like Lanny Fritz to please stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**  
**Health Care System**

MR. MITCHELL: Broken promises, broken trust, a Premier's word that can't be believed. First, the Premier called sick and dying Albertans whiners. Then the Premier referred to them as victims of the week. Now the needless suffering of Albertans is passed off as a mere glitch in the system.

MR. DAY: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: For the record, Mr. Speaker, these glitches are people. They're our loved ones, they're our neighbours, and they certainly didn't get what they deserved from this government. What does the Premier's word mean when he told Albertans for two years to trust him, that he had a plan for health care, and then he admits that he doesn't?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. House leader has already risen on a point of order, but just to make the record clear, I never at any time used the word "whiner" other than to talk about Liberals. These people are whiners; they're the only whiners. Now I am on record.

Mr. Speaker, relative to that incident where I used the word "glitch" . . .

MR. MITCHELL: Explain it to the Desrosiers.

MR. KLEIN: I have explained it to the Desrosiers very publicly.

I was asked by a reporter in Calgary who had no knowledge of the situation, who was asked by an Edmonton reporter to ask me the question. I said: give me the information. The reporter did not have the information. I made a comment, Mr. Speaker, that nothing in society is ever going to be perfect. Nothing in society is ever going to be perfect. I would ask the leader of the Liberal opposition to stand up in this Assembly and state categorically that if they are the government, everything will be perfect all the time, and make that a promise.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't have to state it, Mr. Speaker. We'll show them right after the next election.

What does the Premier's word mean when he promised to create greater efficiency in the health care system but is now proposing to spend the same amount of money that he was spending on it, a system that has 6,500 fewer hospital beds, 8,000 fewer nurses, 8,000 fewer other health care workers, umpteen fewer hospitals, 227 fewer doctors? Mr. Speaker, that spells inefficiency.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health supplement, but that, sir, is simply not true.

Mr. Speaker, here's what the Liberals would have liked, because they like administration, they like bureaucracy. He failed to mention that we have something like 183 fewer hospital boards, fewer administrations, fewer bureaucracies. Relative to the facts with respect to hospital beds and patient care, I will have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, to supplement the hon. Premier's answer, I would just like to share with the members of the Assembly the performance of our system over the last number of years from 1992 to 1996. Certainly the numbers I'm going to quote are a tribute to the people governing the system, to the people administering it, and most of all, of course, to the people working within the system. During this period of restructuring, for instance, in the area of heart surgery, which I think is one that certainly is of interest to people, in 1992 there were 1,344 open-heart surgeries in this province; in 1996, 2,122. In terms of the system's ability to conduct long-term dialysis for patients, the number of cases accommodated in 1992 was 586; in 1996, 851.

Now, there are a number of other examples, but I would just like to mention one other, and that is that in terms of patients overall in the province hospitalized for provincewide services – that is, those life-saving services offered primarily in Edmonton and Calgary – in 1992 we accommodated 6,371 individuals, and in 1996, 7,846.

2:20

MR. MITCHELL: What does the Premier's word mean to the Desrosiers, the Fayads, and countless other Albertans who have suffered and died needlessly because this Premier didn't have a plan for health care, and he's admitted that he still doesn't?

MR. JONSON: If I might reply on behalf of the Premier, I'd like to respond to this question and indicate that we have had a plan in the health care system. We are implementing it, Mr. Speaker.

The vision for the health care system in this province, which is being acted upon, is one in which we want to ensure that escalating health care costs are manageable and under control. We want to focus the health care system on the community and not on acute care hospitals entirely. We want to focus spending on patient care and reduce administrative spending. We want Albertans to have a greater opportunity to be involved in shaping health care services in their area. We want to ensure that the delivery of health care services is co-ordinated and easily accessible. Finally, we want to create a health care system that is focused on keeping Albertans healthy. We want to have a health care system in this province which is the best that it possibly can be and one of the very best systems in the world.

I'd like to table, in case the hon. member across the way thinks that we haven't published this, the documents which support in a very comprehensive way our plan for health in this province.

### Education Funding

MR. MITCHELL: Before the last election the Premier gave his word on an increase in funding for basic education. The overall reduction, Mr. Speaker, in education funding since he broke that promise is almost \$300 million. What's the Premier's word worth on that promise?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of

Education supplement. Again, factually wrong. He hasn't bothered as usual to read the facts to get the right and the true and the honest information. Yes, there has been a reduction in education costs, but most of that has come out of the administration. Like hospital boards, we had 181 boards. Now we have something like 66. They would have liked it better to have the 181 bureaucracies, because Liberals love bureaucracy. That allowed us to put more dollars into the classroom.

Relative to the specifics I will have the hon. Minister of Education supplement. [interjections]

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the slurs and jeers of the opposition are so predictable.

With respect to the education budget, Mr. Speaker, from 1992-93 to the current year, 1996-97, the reduction in education has been in the range of around 5 percent. The Premier is correct that the number of school boards has been reduced from 181 to 66. The reduction and elimination of nonoperating school boards has been a positive move that has allowed more instructional money, tens of millions of dollars more, to go back into the instruction level rather than paying for administration.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of funding that we give for education is significant. It would be in the range of \$3,686 per student throughout the entire province. That is a significant amount of money. Over and on top of that there is money for things like buildings and for operations and maintenance. The approximate budget for education at this time is very close to the same figure it was in 1992-93. We did make reinvestment announcements last June, some good news, money going back into the instruction block, in aggregate a total of \$57 million announced last June to cover things like special needs, like the instruction block, like technology funding.

Overall we do hear of pressure points from time to time, and we're prepared to address those issues.

THE SPEAKER: Order. Perhaps there'll be room in the supplemental to conclude this detailed answer.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, what does the Premier's word mean when he says one thing but his policy is to have one of the lowest funded education systems in the entire country. It's behind P.E.I. It's behind Newfoundland. Newfoundland has balanced its budget.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have balanced our budget too, and we did it the right way, by not increasing taxes and picking people's pockets the way the Liberals would do it.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister did such a good job last time, I'm going to have him once again put the real facts on the table. Over to you, Mr. Minister.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, as demonstrated in the third international math and sciences examinations and the school achievement indicators program, Alberta students do very, very well, and in fact a great deal of credit must go to the teachers and the administrators and the students themselves in the province of Alberta.

It's interesting that historically people have often looked at other jurisdictions as being leaders in the education area, but I can say without fear of contradiction that Alberta is a leader in education in Canada. Mr. Speaker, we do want to make sure that the dollars that we focus on being in the classroom and not going to expensive administration. Accordingly, we fund

education appropriately in the province of Alberta, and we are always prepared to look at the pressure points, but a great deal of credit must go to the school boards and the schoolteachers and the students themselves in the province of Alberta for doing a fine job.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, what does the Premier's word mean when it was his government that cut funding yet he is blaming the teachers for all the problems that he created?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was no question, and I never have blamed the teachers for anything. I will give the teachers credit for doing a darn good job in this province. If there is one person in this Assembly who knows what a good job is being done and performed by the teachers of this province, it's the hon. Minister of Education, who has visited almost every school in the province. Unlike the Liberals he's not visiting schools to make trouble. He doesn't go disguised as a teacher like some disguise themselves as doctors. He goes there to receive honest input from good-thinking teachers and students, and that's what being the Minister of Education is all about. That's what it's all about. It's not about the false information and troublemaking that the Liberals know so well.

2:30

### Seniors' Programs

MR. MITCHELL: In 1993 the Premier gave his word that he would continue his support of those who built today's Alberta. It didn't happen. He gave seniors his word that he would listen and care. Instead, he listened and shredded. What does the Premier's word mean to the 85 percent of seniors who have told us that their standard of living is worse or much worse because of this government's policies?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly the opposite. Those seniors who are in the lower income brackets are now better off, better off today than they were three or four years ago.

Again to present the facts and to do what she can to dispel this absolute fiction being spewed out by the Liberals, I will call on the hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: When changes were made to seniors programs initially, after a very extensive consultation with seniors changes were made on the basis of what seniors told us. They wanted to be a part of change in government and the way we did things, but they wanted to ensure that we protected lower income seniors, protected those that were vulnerable, that needed help. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta seniors' benefit program does that.

Further to that, the Premier instructed about five ministries in fact to do a review of all of the changes that had occurred in programs to ensure that indeed our programs did protect lower income seniors. That review occurred, Mr. Speaker. I received a report from the departments. I shared that report with the interagency council on seniors in this province. They worked very diligently with us along with the Seniors Advisory Council, chaired by my colleague from Calgary-Currie.

In keeping with the recommendations that we received from all of those consultations and all of that invaluable help from the seniors themselves, reinvestment was made in seniors' programs to further ensure that lower income seniors' needs are met in this province, that lower income seniors and those who are vulnerable are protected. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that the seniors in this province want to continue to work with this government, with

this minister to ensure that seniors are protected in the future, and that process is in place and working today.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, what does the Premier's word mean to a senior living in poverty who can no longer afford dentures and eyeglasses, basic necessities of their lives?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I simply have to repeat that our programs relative to seniors were designed to meet the needs of those who need it the most. Again relative to the specifics I'll have the hon. minister supplement my answer.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member across the way has to be aware that this province is, I believe, the only province in Canada that assists seniors with extended health benefit programs. I'm also certain that the hon. member must be aware that there is \$17 million in this past year's budget and in past budgets to ensure that there is assistance for eyeglasses and for dental work, a wide array of dental work.

How was that arrived at? Again, Mr. Speaker, when changes were made to the extended health program, which I must say is the only one of its kind in Canada, we consulted with seniors. We asked seniors: what parts of these programs are most important; what are the most beneficial to seniors? We continue those consultations.

The Minister of Health may wish to comment on the specifics of the dental program, and I'd be very happy to pass it over to the Minister of Health for those discussions.

THE SPEAKER: Perhaps this debate can continue in another part of our proceedings.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, what does the Premier's word mean – no, better yet, what does his handshake mean when what we've been left with is a litany of broken promises, broken trust, and the Premier's word that can't be believed?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recall the election of 1993, in June, and I know what the people were telling us then. They were saying: get your financial house in order. As a result of that, we asked seven good-thinking Albertans to turn over every stone in government. We provided them with every piece of paper possible because we wanted to put the facts on the table and before the public relative to our financial situation. As a result of that report, we said to the people of this province that we would balance the budget and that we would do it on the expenditure side and that we would look at every component of government, including all those agencies that depend on government for funding, and that we would go through major restructuring if necessary. And, yes, we went through that restructuring.

Today we have a balanced budget. We are the only jurisdiction in this country now to address debt. We're actually paying down debt. We're freeing up literally millions and millions of dollars to reinvest and to reinvest wisely in those high-priority areas of health and education, advanced education, career development, and social services for those who truly need our help in society, Mr. Speaker. That is responsible. That is wise spending.

And why did we have to do all this, Mr. Speaker? This report highlighted the problem. [interjections] You see, they don't understand the problem. They do not understand the problem. [interjections]

### Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

THE SPEAKER: The Chair has been more than lenient with the hon. Leader of the Opposition in the way he is crafting his questions. The questions are supposed to be questioning the administrative responsibility of the government, not personalities. Now, the Leader of the Opposition may not like what he's hearing from the hon. Premier, but the Leader of the Opposition opened the door for it and the Premier is entitled to make a response without being shouted down by other members of the Assembly.

### Seniors' Programs (continued)

MR. KLEIN: The Liberals didn't understand it then, although they campaigned very vigorously on a platform of fiscal restraint. They campaigned on a platform of brutal – brutal – cuts. Remember that? But, Mr. Speaker, we campaigned on the facts, and we developed a program to address what had to be done.

Here's what the Financial Review Commission said, Mr. Speaker. It said, "The need for Albertans to support change is urgent," that there are serious debt and deficit problems facing Albertans. "The annual deficit is serious and . . . getting worse." And it would be far worse, it would be absolutely out of control if these people over here were in charge.

It says, "We cannot support this level of spending." It says, "We have spent our savings." It says, "We must adopt a plan to eliminate . . . deficits completely." It says we must "downsize the entire government infrastructure" and that we must "develop budget estimates for revenues on the basis of realistic and conservative assumptions."

The report also said that we don't have a revenue problem; we have a spending problem. And believe me it would be a lot worse with these people in charge.

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

### 2:40 National Forum on Health

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government recently released the final report of the National Forum on Health, which contained a number of recommendations for Canada's publicly funded health system. Could the Minister of Health please comment on the nature of the recommendations and, more importantly, on our province's response to those recommendations?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the national forum was a review of the health care system across Canada that was undertaken by the federal government. [interjections] The federal Liberal government, certainly. It was not an activity that the provincial governments were directly involved in. We have to keep in mind that recommendations that come from that level – we have the responsibility for delivering health care. The practical issues are before us, so it is of importance to the provincial governments.

The key findings of the national forum were that health restructuring across the nation should continue. Secondly, a very noteworthy finding in part of their recommendations was that it was the judgment of the forum, which was a pretty comprehensive review, that there is adequate funding within the health care system now. It is a matter of managing that funding and applying it efficiently and effectively, something that we have been emphasizing already in this province. Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, they



did have three key areas of emphasis in terms of future services. They recommend that we continue to develop and emphasize long-term care, that there should be further emphasis on primary care, and that certainly a need in the system is consideration of payment for drugs for patients who are released from hospital or in long-term care situations. So overall it's an important report, one that we will consider very carefully.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As some of these recommendations have potential cost implications for Alberta, would the minister tell us how the proposed initiatives will be funded?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that the report of the national forum is saying that within the health care system across Canada we do have adequate funding right now. It is a matter of reallocating. It is a matter of building around the health care system certain accountability measures and standards, and that is something that we are certainly doing here in this province.

Mr. Speaker, you know, something is kind of interesting in this whole debate with the federal government, and that is, if I could quote the Liberal Prime Minister of this country at their party convention in October when referring to the health care system needing, in their view, tough medicine: we needed to squeeze it in order to keep it.

Mr. Speaker, those people that are harping across the way should listen to this forum report. It is something that we are certainly taking seriously as a government, and we'll act as is reasonable.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister tell the House what the next steps will be in dealing with the national forum recommendations?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we as the provincial government in Alberta will consider the recommendations of the forum. In addition to that, we as health ministers will be planning to meet to review the forum in detail, to make contact with the federal government over another of the recommendations in the report, and that is if there is a need for predictable and sustainable funding and support from the federal government, something which is of concern to provinces across this nation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

#### **Social Assistance**

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One hundred and six thousand people have been cut off social assistance since 1993. I'll direct my question to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Edmonton's Food Bank is now providing emergency food to 20,000 citizens a month. If the minister embraces true Christian values, how can he tolerate such an embarrassing situation in a time of surplus budgets?

MR. DAY: You know, Mr. Speaker, the member used the phrase: people being cut off welfare. The reference is poorly directed. What's happened over three years is tens of thousands

of Albertans have moved from social assistance to jobs. That's what's happened to them. They've moved to jobs.

Mr. Speaker, it was the absolute conviction of this government, the former minister and myself, that when people are offered opportunity, most of them respond to it. In fact, they did by the tens of thousands moving to job opportunities and to having their skills upgraded. This member across the way says that that's kicking people off. Oh, no. They are pleased with the progress they've made, and I congratulate every individual in this province who took the opportunity and moved to work and moved to having their skills upgraded and moved to having their training enhanced.

Are there still people in the community that need help from the community? Oh, yes, there are. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I meet with all concerned groups, including Edmonton's Food Bank, to see how people who are still in need can be reached out to.

MR. KIRKLAND: I congratulate those few that moved from social service assistance to jobs as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, how can you justify why we have 156,000 children living in poverty in this province and why 40 percent of those food bank users that you meet with are now children?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite follows the lead of his leader by totally ignoring fact and only dwelling on fancy. These stats that he's throwing around are totally ridiculous.

A net increase of 157,000 new jobs, 80 percent of which are full-time, good-paying jobs. I'll tell you the children in those families are glad that their fathers and their mothers have gainful employment.

There are still people in need in this province, and that's why I meet, for instance, with school principals in this particular city. Eleven school principals have been initiated by the government MLAs in Edmonton, and those school principals have told us clearly that it's one thing to feed a hungry child – and in some cases they are doing that – but what is more important is getting to the home and talking to the parent or parents and seeing what it is that can be done to move those parents to independence. I'm taking the lead of school principals like that and of teachers like that who are reaching out to the whole family, and we're going to continue in that direction, Mr. Speaker.

MR. KIRKLAND: The minister is a master at avoiding reality, Mr. Speaker.

My final question: Mr. Minister, why in a province as rich as Alberta do we pay the lowest rates of assistance to our disabled and our single people?

**2:50**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I suppose it would be a false hope to ask that this member would later on, some time today, apologize to anybody who was watching or even listening when he says: the lowest rates to the disabled. The facts, if he would care to look at them, are that persons with disabilities in this province have an assured income that is the second highest anywhere in this country. Get your facts straight.

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

#### **Student Finance**

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents

continue to read in the papers about the increased cost of post-secondary education, and they're concerned about it. In particular they're concerned about the education-related debt students incur before they are gainfully employed. My question is to the hon. minister of advanced education. How do we as a province ensure that debt levels for our students are manageable and also ensure that students with the greatest need continue to have access to higher education?

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

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, yes. In fact I'm sure that students are concerned about debt levels when they enter university or any postsecondary system, as are we. We've put several very significant programs in place to address that. There is an interest subsidy program whereby the taxpayers of Alberta pay all the interest on student loans for six months after being in a program. We introduced a flexible repayment system with the banks to allow students to pay it back with less cost of interest and with terms that suit them better. We also introduced an interest relief program where if students graduate and are still not employed or well enough employed, they can get up to 18 months' additional interest relief so that that doesn't accumulate to their debt. Then there is a remission program that pays a student's debt down when it gets above a certain level so that the student does not leave postsecondary education with a debt level that weighs them down beyond their ability to pay. Again the taxpayers pick up the cost of that remission. There's also nonrepayable grant assistance available to assist those with higher costs experienced by disadvantaged students, such as single parents. So there's a lot of help there so that students don't accumulate a debt they just can't handle.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, can the minister advise this House as to what the maximum debt level is that a student carries after graduation and how it is determined?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, along with all the things that I just recited, we do have a policy in place. The accumulation of both the Canada student loan and the Alberta student loan components – when they're put together, anything in excess of \$18,300 for a four-year program the taxpayers of Alberta will pay down to \$18,300. For a college or a technical institute, that combination again – actually we're offsetting some Canada student loan payments – \$10,000 would be the maximum debt they would leave postsecondary with and would only be expected to pay that back. The taxpayers would pay the remission.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, can the minister advise this House of the impact of tuition increases upon student debt level?

MR. ADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've endeavoured to find out what's happened with students and what they're experiencing. We went through a long process to establish what was fair for the taxpayer to pay and what was fair for the student to pay. The conclusion after significant days of public hearings involving all the stakeholders was that students would pay 30 percent of the operating cost of their postsecondary education. The taxpayer would pick up all of those items that I spoke of previously. As well the taxpayer pays for the capital cost of that, and they pay 70 percent of the operating costs of the institution.

I should also say that the loan limit also increases for students as tuition increases, and there's an annual increment cap so that students can plan what it's going to cost them for their post-secondary education when they enter a four-year program or a two-year program. It was based on a \$200 per year maximum increase plus CPI, going back to 1991. It increases with CPI only beyond that.

So to answer your question, a university undergraduate in 1995-96 would have left with a maximum of \$15,500 after remission; from a college, \$9,200; and from a technical institute, \$8,200.

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

### School Bus Safety

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, three years ago in this Legislature we addressed school bus safety. Three ministers later we're still dealing with school bus safety. They can't get it right. My question is to the minister of transportation. Why is it that three years later you have still done nothing to protect the safety of our children on school buses? Nothing.

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

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the member is saying is totally wrong again. Certainly safety is at the forefront of everything that we do in our department, and we are doing everything possible to see that our students are protected when they're riding a school bus. We have worked with the people that are involved in that, which is a co-operative effort with the Edmonton city police. We're working with the Calgary city police, and we're working with the RCMP as well as our field staff that do checks as well as our auditors as well as the carriers themselves and the school boards. So this is being addressed in a big way.

MRS. SOETAERT: My supplemental to the minister: why is it then, Mr. Minister, that the police have to do your job for you?

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, the member may not understand, but we do work co-operatively with the police and let them help us do the inspections. That is part of our inspection system.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

### Student Achievement Tests

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Education. Earlier this afternoon the minister referred to the results that Alberta students achieved in standardized tests and the comparisons with other students around the country and indeed around the world. The parents of students in my constituency are really concerned about the education that their children are receiving and whether that education is sufficient to move them into the lifelong learning process. My questions to the minister this afternoon are: what is the relevance of these standardized tests, and why are we comparing ourselves to other countries?

3:00

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the tests that I referred to earlier this

afternoon in question period were the third international math and science study and the school achievement indicators program. The first one, the TIMS report, is in reference to international results, and the second set of tests, the SAIP results, refers to the national test that Alberta students participate in. The results of these tests show that Alberta students are gaining a competitive edge not only internationally but nationally, and these results were not unexpected. They were certainly anticipated, and they are the latest in a series of international and national test results that show Alberta students are doing very well.

According to the TIMS report, Alberta students performed in the top third of participating countries in the area of mathematics. In fact, Mr. Speaker, among English-speaking jurisdictions British Columbia and Alberta students were in the top of that category. In the area of science they virtually tied for second place with students from Japan and Korea. In the SAIP national tests our students achieved significantly higher results than the rest of Canada, and interestingly and significantly boys and girls did equally well.

Mr. Speaker, I think that these tests are important, because they demonstrate that Alberta students are doing well in an international and national forum. We know our economy in terms of its competition is global, and I think that these tests demonstrate and answer the question: how do Alberta students stack up against students around Canada and around the world? The answer is: we stack up very, very well indeed.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister could advise if these tests realistically measure the performance of Alberta's education system.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, student learning is our first priority. These tests cannot measure all of the student performance in our curriculum, but they do act as a very important indicator of how our system does support our students. I think that the results of the tests speak to the issue of the alignment of four key elements in our education system: developing a very specified curriculum, selecting strong resources to support that curriculum, having teachers who understand and promote that curriculum, and having a strong assessment process. The tests also show that our education partnerships with groups throughout the province are working well. The changes that we have made in curriculum and in learning expectations are the result of teachers, administrators, and communities working together in a shared commitment to education. This is part of the Alberta advantage, and it is clearly a demonstration of the fact that we all benefit from students being well educated, so we must all also share in the responsibility for it.

THE SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. Do the results of these tests have any significance outside of education?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, one key feature of the SAIP tests lies with the manner in which the tests are constructed. The standards that students are expected to meet are developed in consultation with members of the community. Half of the people involved in the SAIP standards were educators, but the other half were parents, students, and business representatives. Tests like TIMS

and SAIP show more than adequately that Alberta is exceeding national expectations. They also show that our students are meeting the expectations of parents and postsecondary institutions and the workplace.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

### Rural Physicians

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a week ago the people of Grande Cache feared that they would not be supplied with any doctors, that their medical services would come to an end. That crisis was the exact result of this government's action or, rather, inaction. Once again a broken promise here to provide adequate health care to all Albertans. Now, the Mistahia health region is still short about 11 doctors, including several specialists. Many other rural towns are desperately trying to attract doctors, which is made all the more difficult because of the health policies of this government. I'd like to ask the minister: when is he finally going to deliver on his promise and find the necessary doctors for rural areas?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all the premise from which the hon. member begins is a little bit misleading, possibly, to the House. The crisis that he is referring to was the result of two doctors who had been attracted to Canada, as I understand it, through the good efforts of the Mistahia region and our own provincial rural doctor plan with the intention of going to Grande Cache. As we know, this has been rather an inclement winter, and there was some hesitation, I guess, prior to them actually ending up in Grande Cache, which they did and which we're all glad to see. There was a period of time when the expected doctors did not arrive, and from across this province we got offers of support from our medical community to go to Grande Cache. There were doctors that arrived and more that were ready to come to help out in this difficult situation. As of the last report Grande Cache does have an adequate complement of doctors, and I think this is, as I said, through the efforts of the Mistahia region and the government and the College of Physicians and Surgeons working in co-operation.

THE SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. What is happening at the moment is a very temporary solution. We're still looking for permanent doctors there. So are a whole lot of other communities.

I'd like to ask the minister, then, if I may: why does the government not at least provide the funds to the regional health authorities to do their own recruiting and to help these people keep the doctors there?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all I hope that the hon. member across the way portrays himself and government overall to the people that are locating as doctors in Grande Cache more positively, because we certainly want those doctors to become permanent professionals in Grande Cache.

The other thing though, Mr. Speaker, in direct answer to his question, is that the province has committed a considerable amount of money to the rural physician action plan, well in excess of \$2 million, and that rural physician action plan, which does need the co-operation of regional health authorities and local communities, has had results across this province. I could use as

an example a father/son team of doctors locating in the town of Smoky Lake. I understand that the people are quite pleased with the service, the doctors are happy with their community, and all prospects would seem to indicate that they are going to be there for a number of years. I certainly hope so.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously doesn't understand what I'm talking about. It is not just Grande Cache. We're talking about needing doctors in Fort McMurray, 12 more doctors, Edson, Milk River, Valleyview, et cetera, et cetera. What have you done for them?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been doctors locating to the rural parts of this province. It is an issue that is faced across this country, even in Liberal provinces, you know. I think there are one or two.

MR. DAY: It's two.

MR. JONSON: Okay. Two. It is a national problem with the demands that are placed upon doctors in rural settings, but I think that we have a good record through our plan that we have in place. Yes, we still have a problem in a number of communities across this province, Mr. Speaker, but it is something we are taking action on and having success with.

### 3:10 Members' Statements

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

#### Out-of-Country Medical Services

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lance Relland is a remarkable young Albertan. Lance is an accomplished artist who has traveled the globe performing and has worked with his family who are all dynamic community volunteers. In July of last year Lance was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. If left untreated, this disease is fatal.

Funding for the needed therapy was denied because it was deemed to be experimental. In fact, it is not experimental. Lance became the 84th person to receive treatment at the Biotherapy Institute in Minnesota. Lance's family spent three months fighting with the government for funding before forging ahead on their own.

After receiving treatment, Lance had this to say to the government:

It would also be my advice, as a youth member of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party and in responsibility to the taxpayers, that your out-of-country Health Services Committee start accessing people more qualified to be involved in the funding decision. Some of the information provided in my case by invited professionals bears little resemblance to reality and this makes it really very difficult for the Committee to be functional. I did not want to bring politics into the issue of health care and my survival, but unfortunately, this decision was made by your office when . . . my parents were barred access to the Alberta Legislature building when trying to deliver the third application for funding and to discuss some of the real concerns.

Today, I am alive, and I have learned to fight for myself. The issues no longer have the same emotional dimensions and intensity thanks to the treatment I received in Minnesota. I also had much support in Minnesota from the social workers and child-family workers.

It is a sad reality that our government places a limited dollar value on considerations such as human health. Every person has a right to live.

Mr. Speaker, Lance Relland returns to Edmonton on Wednesday, February 19, and it's a tribute to him and his supporters that they have persevered and have overcome bureaucracy, closed-mindedness, and an unresponsive government.

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

#### Education System

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At recent meetings with parents and teachers in my community a number of questions were asked with respect to the educational needs of our children and our students. Some of these questions were about resources in the classroom. Others centred on partnerships, curriculum, technology, and professional development. The issue that prompts my comments today and which was most apparent was the issue of communication.

Mr. Speaker, the educational community within Calgary is complex. In addition to the provincial responsibilities established through the BNA Act, at the community level we have interests. There are public and separate school boards. We have charter schools, private schools, and of course we have the component of home schooling. But all focus on one objective, and that simply stated is the education of our children.

Some of the specific inquiries that they are bringing forward include: how are resources allocated? Who sets budget priorities? How is professional development of teachers prioritized? Where do we get specific budget information? The most important question is: no one seems to have all the answers. Perhaps the most frustrating aspect which is developing is the uncertainty that inappropriate decisions are being made across all levels of education.

Mr. Speaker, it is my contention that it is time to move from assigning blame to responding to the broad range of educational interests articulated by parents, students, and teachers. I'm encouraged by the level of awareness of parents, the work of the trustee associations, the initiatives of the home and school associations. The diversity of our educational community must be recognized by all leaders in the educational community, by our editorial boards, by the Alberta Teachers' Association, and by our business community. Good information in the hands of all decision-makers communicated without bias is essential to the successful education of our students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

#### Rural Physicians

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I referred earlier to the barely averted health crisis in Grande Cache. We still need a long-term solution there, and after all, it is symptomatic of our health care in rural Alberta.

For a long time now we have warned the government that its health care policies have led to a net loss of doctors from the province. In rural Alberta we've lost 40 out of 600 doctors. That's 7 percent. At this moment the Mistahia RHA still needs 11 doctors, amongst them several specialists. Fort McMurray needs 12 more doctors. Edson, Milk River, Valleyview – and the list goes on – all need doctors.

In the case of Grande Cache the crisis was averted because of the hard work of the Mistahia RHA in attracting two physicians to move in. I was on the phone to doctors in Hinton who decided that they would take turns rotating through Grande Cache and provide services.

Now, I wrote both the Premier and the minister, and they responded by listing all the measures they have taken since 1992, and they clearly have not worked. So it is time that the minister put into place policies that are going to provide those needed physicians.

Let me give him some solid suggestions, part of our proposed policies. First of all, establish a differential fee system for rural doctors reflecting the specific requirements placed on them. Second, reserve places in both our medical schools for aspiring doctors who are keen to go to rural areas for a certain number of years. Third, devise a guaranteed locum exchange program that would ensure rural doctors some relief. Four, provide the RHAs with the necessary resources to recruit and retain physicians. Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to urge the minister to, for heaven's sake, develop a comprehensive plan on health care.

Thank you.

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

#### Point of Order False Allegations

MR. DAY: Under 23(h), (i), and (j), Mr. Speaker. There was a reference made by the Leader of the Opposition in which he said that the Premier referred to people who were having difficulty with health care issues as whiners. I'm trying to look for a word to use for that description used by the opposition leader that won't get me thrown out of this Assembly. I feel very strongly about it. It was not true. It was a total fabrication. It was an absolute falsehood. There wasn't a shred or a grain of truth to that. This Premier has never referred to people having difficulty in health care or any other area as whiners. As a matter of fact, when the Leader of the Opposition . . . [interjection] Yes, he did say that, and if you took the time to read, which I doubt you'd ever do, you'd see that he did.

Mr. Speaker, in the period of time today when the Leader of the Opposition wrongly used that absolutely false information, we've had time to do a *Hansard* word check of the last four years. The Premier has never used the word "whiner." The only people who've used the word "whiner" are those people right over there. The Liberals have used the word "whiner."

On the point of order I think we are due an apology for an absolutely misleading statement by the Leader of the Opposition.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Speaker, the reference to *Hansard* that the member opposite refers to is not what the Member for Edmonton-McClung was referring to. I was going to say Meadowlark, but that was the last Legislature, and the name has changed. The fact is that the government has made it very clear. I attended a function as recently as the dinner in Calgary for the installation of Murray Mikulak, the new Calgary Chamber of Commerce president, wherein the Premier made reference to people who were not agreeing with him, who were picketing around McDougall Centre, again very negative comments. I'll be like the member opposite and be very careful in the words that I use in describing those kinds of comments. So while the comments may not have appeared in *Hansard*, I think the comments certainly are on the public record.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair feels that we now have had a good example as to why we should not ask questions that are personality based. Questions in this House, proper questions, are to test

the government on its administrative record in governing this province, not on personalities. The Chair has already commented on that during question period, but this question period being the first one of this session, when it appears that all members of the Assembly are full of vim and vigour and energy, the Chair perhaps gave a little extra latitude in the framing of those questions. But from now on, hon. members, now that we have the first day over with, please – please – try to understand what the purpose of question period is. It is not to demolish personalities. It's to test the government's actions, not what people have been saying and talking about but what the government has actually been doing.

3:20

MR. DAY: We'll do better tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding to the application under Standing Order 40, the Chair would like to make a few comments and take this opportunity to clarify a few points concerning the order and timing of consideration of private members' Bills. In that connection we're almost running out of time for private members' Bills today. I hope that the Chair won't be the cause of it expiring.

By way of background, when the Standing Orders were amended in 1993 to allow for the timely consideration of private members' Bills, provision was not made for every eventuality. To refresh members' memories, Standing Order 8(5)(c) provides that a private member's Bill must "be called in Committee of the Whole within eight sitting days of the day [it] receives second reading." Standing Order 8(5)(d) provides that a private member's Bill must be moved for third reading within four sitting days of the day on which it is reported by Committee of the Whole.

Last August the issue arose as to the process and procedure for determining the order in which these Bills were to be considered by the House and the Committee of the Whole. The Chair takes seriously the role of defending the interests of private members, on whatever side of the House they may sit, and wants to reinforce the points made in the August 20, 1996, ruling by the Deputy Speaker on this matter.

First, it must be stressed that the order of private members' business is governed by Standing Order 9(1), which states that such business is taken up in accordance with the order of precedence. In this connection the Chair would like to emphasize that this is not government business, so the order is not determined by the government. It is the Chair that determines the precedence of private members' business. Of course that determination must be based on some understood rules, which is what the Deputy Speaker established in his August 20, 1996, ruling and which the Chair would now like to expand upon.

Usually Bills will be considered in numerical order, but a problem arises when different Bills are at various stages. Given the gap in our Standing Orders on the process, the Chair would like to reiterate for the guidance of members the rules for early consideration of private members' Bills.

One, when debate is continuing on a stage of a Bill or a Bill is before the Committee of the Whole, then debate at that stage will continue until the relevant vote is taken.

Two, the exception is that when the deadline for considering a Bill under Standing Order 8(5)(c) or (d) comes up, then that Bill will be the first order of business.

Three, if a member wants his or her Bill to be considered before the due date, then that member must make a written request to the Speaker prior to the opening of the House the day before the member wants the Bill to be considered. For example, if a member wants a Bill to be considered on a Wednesday, the letter must be received by the Speaker before the opening of the House on Tuesday, on which day the Chair will table the letter.

Four, when a member requests that his or her Bill be considered before its due date, the Bill will be called after debate has concluded on the private member's public Bill that is then before the House or Committee of the Whole, assuming that no other Bills have reached their due dates.

The other side of the coin is when a member wants to delay consideration of his or her private member's Bill. In the Chair's experience this desire becomes apparent when the Bill is in Committee of the Whole. In the Chair's October 30, 1995, memo to all members it was pointed out that a member who wishes to postpone consideration of his or her Bill to a date certain should make that motion, which is different than the hoist, during second reading, as provided for in Standing Order 41(c). Members may recall that on March 13, 1996, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont moved in Committee of the Whole that consideration of his Bill be deferred until April 17, 1996, or "the first day for consideration of private members' business after that date." The motion was agreed to, and the Bill was taken up by the Committee of the Whole on April 17.

In determining a process, the Chair has been concerned about preserving the traditional role of the Committee of the Whole to consider the business referred to it and the spirit of the 1993 amendments to the Standing Orders and the September 9, 1993, memorandum of agreement concerning private members' business. In keeping with these principles and precedents from other jurisdictions, the Chair recommends that if a member wishes to delay consideration of a Bill when it is before the Committee of the Whole, the member should move that the committee report progress and request that it not be considered by the committee until its date certain. Only the member sponsoring the Bill can move that consideration be deferred in Committee of the Whole. If the motion is agreed to, the Chairman would report progress on the Bill and recommend that it not be considered by the committee until the date specified by the member. If the House concurs in the report, then the Bill would come before the committee on the date specified or the first following day for consideration of private members' Bills, assuming no other Bills have reached their due dates.

The Chair appreciates the opportunity to clarify these matters and hopes that it assists members in making the 1993 changes concerning private members work to everyone's benefit.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**  
**Random Acts of Kindness Week**

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

Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize February 10 through 16 as Random Acts of Kindness Week and congratulate Colleen Ring as the chair of the Random Acts of Kindness Week Committee and all the volunteers associated with it.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 40 to address the matter of urgency associated

with the motion I brought in earlier, and that is to congratulate certain individuals and officially recognize from the legislative body here Random Acts of Kindness Week, which takes place this week. The urgency is twofold, I suppose. Number one, the event kicked off yesterday, and it only runs this week. Secondly, who knows when this House will meet again to have such an opportunity? We supported it unanimously last year. It is a very positive and a very happy occasion, and I hope we can seek unanimous approval for it to proceed again, on a brief basis at least, today.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has requested unanimous consent from the Assembly to present a motion. All those in favour of this application, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The application fails.

Hon. members, we've now reached the point where the clock appears to the Chair to read 3:30. At that time we move to a certain order of business, and we'll let the Table call that order of business.

3:30

**Orders of the Day**

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

**Video Lottery Terminals**

501. Mr. Mitchell moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ban all video lottery terminals from operating in Alberta.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I rise to address Motion 501, which calls for the elimination of video slot machines from this province. The issue facing Albertans today in their government is a question of values. They have a very clear choice. On the one side they have the choice of a government that has distinguished itself by basing what it does on a set of what they might call values. Describing that set of values, we would have to use terms like bottom lines, financial perspectives, money, money, money as an end in itself.

Mr. Speaker, some other distinguishing features of that set of values are statements like: it's every man for himself in this province. This has been made very clearly by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. He said that that's the philosophy of the Conservative Party, forgetting of course that 50 percent of this province happens to be women and forgetting of course that not a single section of this province has ever been built by somebody by themselves. We have always worked together as neighbours, we have brought the strength and the goodness out in people, and we have worked together to build things that could be great and things that could be good.

Mr. Speaker, another statement that might capture the spirit of their values is: sharing means less for me, or if I have a lot of money, I'm entitled to the first tier of a two-tiered system. I didn't grow up in a province where those kinds of values were

ever expressed explicitly or were ever thought or promoted implicitly. I grew up in a province where there was very clearly a different set of values. Those are the values that we uphold. Those are the values that reflect what Albertans are and what they want in their government, a set of values that say you only build strong communities when people are willing to give up something to other people, that you only build strong communities when those people who are especially privileged, like the members that sit across the way, are prepared to give something back because they have a special responsibility to give something back. You only build strong communities when you do things right and when you do them properly, and you can never build something that is good or something that is great on somebody else's heartbreak or somebody else's vulnerability.

If ever there were an illustration of the clear differences, the clear choice that Albertans have to make in this upcoming election, it is found in the video slot machine issue. On the one side you have the government, that has very clearly defined its set of values. Video slot machines: they promote them. They won't take them out no matter what the pressure is, no matter what Albertans want, because they don't think it matters where money comes from. Money is an end in itself. Money is the be-all and end-all. It is a value in and of itself to these people.

On the other side is a position that clearly defines the different set of values and clearly defines what Albertans are thinking, and that is that it does matter where money comes from. It matters to me, it matters to my party, and it matters to Albertans where money comes from. I don't want my children to get some perceived benefit, a rink or a playground or some other project, based upon somebody else's vulnerability, based upon taking advantage of somebody else's vulnerability. What kind of place does that define, Mr. Speaker? What kind of leadership would that portray and create in this province? It creates a meanness. It creates a mean-spiritedness. It creates an arrogance of those who have over those who have not. It doesn't create dignity, it doesn't create decency, and it doesn't create greatness within this province.

DR. WEST: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism is rising on a point of order.

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

DR. WEST: Yes. Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j): indicating false motives. The hon. member has said that the government would not remove the VLTs for any reason. I'm on record and I've made statements, along with the policy of the government, that if any municipality demonstrates their community standards through a plebiscite, we would honour that and remove the VLTs. So I do believe he has misled the House.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

MR. DAY: On the point of order, Grant.

MR. MITCHELL: Stockwell, you don't tell me what I'm going to talk about ever.

Mr. Speaker, what we have is a clearly defined choice. We have a set of values that puts people last, that puts values last, and that thinks money is the only thing that's important to the people

of this province, and we have another set of values that says people are first and that we have to embrace and reflect values that build them and build their communities and make them strong and give them hope for the future. That brings me to the question of video slot machines and our position. We're going to ban them. We're going to get rid of them. We're going to phase them out of this province.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair was wondering whether the hon. Leader of the Opposition was going to respond to the point of order raised by the hon. minister.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, there's no point of order because he says that I was making allegations against a member. That's what it says in here. But I wasn't. I was talking about his government.

MR. DAY: No. You said he wouldn't take them out. That's what you said, Grant.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, we'll get the Blues and look at it. We'll check it out tomorrow in the House.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair will have to check the transcript because the Chair unfortunately didn't hear the words that are in dispute at the present time.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. You didn't hear them because I didn't say them, Mr. Speaker. It's not unfortunate; it's true.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. MITCHELL: So that brings us to our position of banning video slot machines. There are 30,000 addicted gamblers in this province, Roy.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, that's the second time you've used the Christian names of hon. members. Please refer to them by their constituency.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw Roy's name.

There are 30,000 addicted gamblers in this province. There are, Olds-Didsbury, 125,000 problem gamblers in this province. If you take two or three people per family household, you know how many people are affected by problem gambling in this province, Olds-Didsbury? There are 375,000, 400,000 people. What a legacy to leave.

Mr. Speaker, they'll say: well, people gamble, and it's all the same. It isn't all the same. When British Columbia asked AADAC whether they should put in VLTs, video slot machines, you know what they said? They said: don't do it; they're far too dangerous. How do I know they were right for sure? Because the minister responsible for video slot machines said that these machines are wrong as well. But he doesn't have the courage of his convictions to stand up and do what we're going to do, which is to take them out. Now they say, because they're so good at this, so good at trying to shift the issue and reframe it, that everything's okay because they've solved the problem they created. They're no longer going to penalize any community that doesn't want to have video slot machines.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: You mean they're not going to beat them with a club?

MR. MITCHELL: They're actually not going to beat them with a club.

It's an amazing effort to try and shift the issue. The issue isn't who's getting the money; the issue is where the money comes from. So, Mr. Speaker, these things absolutely have to go.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

They will say that it's going to hurt economies. No, it doesn't. In Rocky Mountain House they lose 2 and a half million dollars a year to video slot machines. In Barrhead, the greatest member of the turnaround, they lose \$6 million a year. This is money that doesn't buy shoes or cars or lunches or farm implements or food in those communities, in those regional economies. This is money that comes to the province so that these people can buy or attempt to buy people's votes.

3:40

MR. DAY: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

**Point of Order  
Imputing Motives**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, again citing 23(h), (i), and (j). You know, there's a profound irony here, and it's with real disappointment that I would suggest that the issue the opposition leader is talking about is a very important issue. It's one that needs to be looked at. It's one that communities are looking at. It's one that some communities are in favour of and other communities are not. In fact, what the leader of . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: What's the point of order?

MR. DAY: I've already cited the point of order. [interjections] Listen; Grant never even got to his. I'm getting to mine.

Mr. Speaker, the point is this. The member has just said that money is going to be used to buy votes. [interjections] I've got lots of time to stand here while they thump their desks.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is a long-held custom in parliamentary bodies such as ours that when an hon. member is recognized by the Chair to speak, we let him or her speak. We may disagree with what they're saying or even with the purpose for which they are getting up, but they have been recognized. Could we now hear the concluding comments on the point of order that's been raised by the hon. Government House Leader.

Hon. leader.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, thank you for bringing the opposition members to heel so that I can address this. The opposition leader, as I said, is on a very important and key issue that is on the hearts and minds of a lot of Albertans, and when he violates Standing Order 23(h), making allegations against members; 23(i), imputing "false or unavowed motives;" and 23(j), using abusive language, what he has done is take this issue of VLTs and tried to slur that over to mean that it has something to do with buying votes. I would suggest I have rarely seen a clearer indication of a violation of 23(i), which is imputing "false or unavowed motives," and also of making allegations. Mr. Speaker, this issue is too important to cheaply politicize the issue, and I would ask the opposition leader

to try and defend the position that he's made here. These are clearly false, unavowed motives and insulting language. I would like to see him try and defend that language.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition in reply to the point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I will defend it. I will tell him. I can remember a time when lottery money was allocated through the CRC grant program, and if you'll recall, that program was structured so that the money went to the municipal authorities, who were elected, and they could allocate that money. After this Premier became Premier, the government changed that because they weren't getting enough credit for it. What they did was they set up CFEP. The only difference was that now Conservative MLAs got to walk into ridings and hand out cheques to buy votes. Now, I don't know if there's some other reason for that change. I can't imagine it. In fact, if you want an illustration of how this government is buying votes with lottery funds, there it is. Absolutely. I am glad that the House leader has the gall to stand up and try to be self-righteous about that. He's self-righteous about so many things.

Mr. Speaker, as a magnanimous gesture they have said: it's okay; we're going to allow municipalities – how condescending – to have a petition and tell us what they want to do. How quickly it is that they forget.

DR. WEST: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, when the hon. member is replying to a point of order, even though he's at some variance from it, another point of order is not allowed. So you'll have to wait until we've had two people speak. We're now on the second person speaking on the point of order. The Chair will rule, and then we may continue debate.

Hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, would you conclude the points on the point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: I made my point, that clearly they buy votes, or they wouldn't have changed from CRC to CFEP and have the rest of them go and hand out cheques.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, we have a point of order that's been raised by the hon. Government House Leader, 23(h), (i), (j), sort of a shotgun kind of thing. The Chair would note "makes allegations against another member" as opposed to general members, as appeared to be suggested.

The response from the hon. Leader of the Opposition I think reflects what has occurred in this exchange on the purported point of order, and that is we have a difference of opinion between members. That's not truly a point of order. However, I would mention that the issue that was raised by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition about the buying of votes, hon. members, as you know, is not properly parliamentary language, and hopefully we can refrain from that kind of reference.

We now have before us a private member's motion. May we please return to the private member's motion.

**Debate Continued**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the government in its effort to distract even further has now begun to take credit for this magnanimous gesture that it will honour any plebiscite passed by



a community. How quickly they forget that they never had a plebiscite community by community to see if they wanted them in the first place.

What we have here, Mr. Speaker, is a need for leadership, value-based leadership, that says that people do matter and that says that fortunate people don't take advantage of less fortunate people.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order, hon. minister.

#### **Point of Order Clarification**

DR. WEST: Actually a point of clarification, Mr. Speaker, if I could. The motion talks about video lottery machines, but at the beginning the hon. Leader of the Opposition said: video slot machines. Indeed the video slot machines are only located in charitable casinos. I would wonder if he could clarify whether his whole debate is on slot machines or is on VLTs.

MR. MITCHELL: I'll clarify, Mr. Speaker. I'll clarify it. It's the classic. They try to put some candy-coated name on it so it sounds like a TV in your living room. Well, it isn't a TV in your living room, and it isn't a lottery terminal. It's a video slot machine just like you find in Las Vegas, just like you find wherever people are being taken advantage of by this kind of addictive gambling. That's what it is.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm not really certain that the hon. member has clarified the answer, but I'm not certain that there was a clarification citation. In any event, we have a difference of opinion. Could we please have the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition conclude his debate on the motion, unless it's already concluded.

MR. MITCHELL: I would be so happy to do that, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. MITCHELL: So they say that they'll honour a petition or they'll honour a plebiscite. Mr. Speaker, they didn't need a plebiscite to put them in; they don't need a plebiscite to take them out. What they need is leadership, leadership based on values, leadership that understands that people do matter and that it does matter where money comes from. That's the kind of leadership that this motion stands for, that's the kind of leadership that it's premised on, and that's the kind of leadership our government's going to provide right after the next election.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, and I hope I can add some insight into this debate. Alberta has long been a pioneer amongst Canadian provinces in fashioning very strict but workable regulatory controls for its gambling industry. Gambling in this province provides not only recreation and entertainment but significant financial returns both to charities and, yes, to the government, and it provides employment. In fact, it has been stated that over 9,000 jobs are generated as a direct result of the gambling and gaming expenditures in this province.

We all know what is involved with gambling. Pull tickets, bingos, raffles, horse racing, ticket lotteries, sports betting, video lottery terminals, casinos to raise money for charities and

volunteer organizations are forms of legalized gaming supported and enjoyed by many Albertans.

**3:50**

Recent research indicates that 84 percent of the population gamble reasonably. These are Albertans who gamble for entertainment, recreational, or social reasons and have never experienced problems related to the activity. These are people who enjoy betting on horse races, playing bingo, buying lottery tickets, and yes, even playing VLTs.

I'm pleased today to be able to speak with you on this motion because lotteries and gaming in Alberta are very important issues to me. I have spent considerable time and energy along with several of my colleagues over the last two years studying the impacts of lotteries, gaming, and VLTs. I'd like to begin my remarks by saying that yes, VLTs do have a negative impact on some Albertans. We recognize that. Some families are devastated. Some people do lose their homes, their jobs, and their very existence, but it is far too simplistic to say that this is totally the fault of VLTs alone. A VLT is simply the tool which feeds the addiction. I've listened many times to representatives from Gamblers Anonymous. They say that a gambling addiction is somewhat similar to an alcohol addiction. Sometimes there is choice in the type of alcohol consumed, but when push comes to shove, as it so often does with addictions, it doesn't matter in the end whether they drink rye, rum, beer, vodka, or gin.

So how do we handle this? Do we eliminate all gambling opportunities, as this motion suggests? I have to say no. This does not solve the problem. In fact, I think it could make it worse. Calling for the complete removal of all VLTs in Alberta assumes that all those playing in this province are irresponsible and that anyone who plays the VLTs will become addicted. That is nonsense. AADAC statistics show that close to 95 percent of gamblers play, without any problem, simply for recreational, entertainment, or social purposes. That means 5 percent suffer from some type of gambling problem at some point.

So do we take the shotgun approach and say that since this segment of society can't handle VLTs, no one should get the opportunity to play? Or do we let Albertans manage their own affairs and stand by often to help others, those with a problem? I'd like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that banning VLTs is not an option that was requested two years ago by the Alberta public. As part of the Lotteries Review Committee we talked with thousands of Albertans. They suggested an overall cap on the number of machines in the province and a further cap placed on the number of machines allowed per facility. This has been done. They felt communities should share in the revenues from VLTs. They did not ask us to eliminate VLTs entirely.

I find it strange that the Leader of the Opposition talks about the importance of community, its self-determination and autonomy, and still brings a motion like this forward. If he listens to his own argument, then this motion is redundant. It was recently announced that the provincial government would honour the results of any community plebiscite on a single majority vote and would remove VLTs from that community as soon as possible thereafter, that a funding formula to return a percentage of VLT revenues to communities would be outlined shortly, and that once a formula had been implemented, all Alberta communities would continue to share equally in VLT revenues regardless of whether VLTs are located in that community or not. Why does the opposition feel the need to make the decision for everyone? Why can't a community make this decision for themselves, from the bottom up, instead of having someone else make it, from the top

down? Choice to play, choice to have the machines in your community.

Leaving that issue aside for a moment, I'd like to talk about possible consequences of removing government-regulated VLTs *carte blanche*. Not only will this solution not solve all of the problems, but I believe that in fact it could cause us graver concerns. You just need to look at the experiences of other jurisdictions, Ontario and Quebec, to understand what I mean.

### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair hesitates to interrupt the hon. member, but we seem to have a lively debate going on parallel to yours. I would remind hon. members so engaged that there is only one speaker speaking at this time, and that's the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

### Debate Continued

MRS. GORDON: Thank you.

I'm talking about underground gambling, illegal gaming, VLT machines operating against the law in bars, lounges, laundromats, and other places where the government has provided neither regulation nor control. Remove the legal machines and VLTs will still exist in this province. The only difference will be that the profits made by these machines will not help Albertans or Alberta communities. They will not help build our roads, our schools, our arenas, or our parks. Instead, the profits will line the pockets of those involved in and with organized crime. Over the last two years I've had the opportunity on several occasions to talk with many other jurisdictions in Canada, and this is precisely why both Quebec and Ontario have decided, in discussions with several jurisdictions, to regulate VLT machines in their respective provinces. At least this way they can use the profits to benefit people in their province as a whole and help those individuals who have come forth with an addiction problem.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about British Columbia. A few years ago the Legislature there chose not to legalize VLTs. The concerns about illegal gambling in British Columbia are growing. In fact, at this time there is a government review in British Columbia that is focusing on the social impact of illegal gambling. In that province police don't even know how many machines are operating outside the law. I think that they will be shocked to find at the end of the day what this review discovers. Please consider the following. Yes, there are many sad stories of VLT gambling, but what would happen if the government weren't there to help? What would happen if problem gamblers were afraid to access help because their addiction was illegal or if the criminal element was the only regulator and net recipient of VLT operations and revenues?

We cannot say that greater police enforcement will work. Provinces like Quebec and Ontario have considered this option and rejected it in favour of legalizing the machines. It is proven that legalization reduces the probability of illegal operations. Quebec's statistics show that the number of illegal machines in that province has dropped from 25,000 to 2,000 since government VLTs were introduced. Meetings that we held with representatives of city police forces and the RCMP in Alberta indicate that the current controls on VLTs have been very effective in limiting illegal gambling. In their view, eliminating VLTs or drastically limiting their availability will only open the doors to illegal gambling. They have watched with interest the approach taken in other provinces, and the results are clear. There is very little

control over illegal machines, and police in these jurisdictions are unable to stop it or control it.

I think Sergeant Bob McDonald of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police K Division said it best when he said that the prohibition era demonstrated that when people have an appetite for a commodity, they will go to great lengths to acquire it, even to the point of contravening laws. We believe it is a fair statement to say that if the province were to now eliminate gambling entirely, a greater underground criminal market would undoubtedly develop to satisfy the desires of those people who have experienced the thrill of gambling and demand accessibility to that activity.

My question to the hon. Leader of the Opposition is: why are you and your colleagues talking out of both sides of your mouth? You can't have your cake and eat it too. Eliminate VLTs or return VLT revenue back to local communities: what will it be?

Some time ago the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford read the following in this Legislature.

The Alberta [Liberal] caucus believes lottery and gaming revenue in Alberta (including VLT revenue) should be first used to give local governments a \$30 per capita grant to fund community groups, and that the balance should be used to pay down our huge provincial debt.

Worth noting: that was part of a survey done by the Liberals, and 64.5 per cent, or 327 people, agreed with this statement.

### 4:00

Please allow me to give you some background in what is a realistic approach to gaming and gambling. I think it is very, very important, certainly with what is coming up in Rocky Mountain House, that people are aware that illegal gaming activity has happened in other provinces. We've talked to those provinces; we know the consequences. So I think it is important that these communities know that that can happen.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Gambling has always existed, ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, and it will continue to, whether it be at the racetrack, a poker game in someone's basement, or a bingo to help out the local hockey team. I think the government would be abdicating its social responsibility by leaving the scene now, by giving up its regulatory control. We must ensure that the games are played fairly and safely and offer government-sanctioned help for those who run into problems.

This motion calls on the government to advocate, to tell Albertans they aren't responsible enough to handle these kinds of machines. Albertans know best what is right for them. They told us repeatedly during the lottery review, and they will tell us again when and if they choose to undertake a petition calling for a plebiscite on whether or not to remove the machines from their communities, the communities they know. Albertans told us they were prepared to make these choices. Our government is going to allow them to do so. We don't need to do it for them.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by saying that I do support the motion, and let me say that raising government revenue by the use of VLTs is a vicious, mean, devastating way of raising dollars. It's an act of desperation, an act of desperation that I don't understand. You have a govern-

ment that brags about its surplus, a huge surplus. Is there a need for this \$473 million? Is there a desperation? Is there no consideration given to the consequences of raising money? Do we raise money no matter what the consequences may be? Is there no limitation as to what is right and what is wrong?

The member has talked about addiction. Studies done by people like Garry Smith, Harold Wynne, studies from the States – it doesn't matter where – have shown that VLTs are the cocaine of gambling. They are the most conducive to addiction. Studies have shown that one can become addicted to VLTs after 10 hours of playing them, 10 hours. By comparison, playing the racetrack on an extremely regular basis, it would take 10 years to achieve the same type of addiction, and that's playing them on an extremely regular basis.

Government has an obligation to look at the hurt that the machines cause and are causing and will continue to cause as long as they're in. There have been cases of reported suicides, without question, to this caucus: people who have called and said that relatives had become so addicted to the machines that they saw no way out.

Crimes. A judge in Calgary gave a lady a bit of a break because she stole \$55,000 to feed a habit. He recognized that the harm was created by the machines, that this was an individual who was a law-abiding, good citizen. The woman, driven by her conscience, a conscience that the government isn't demonstrating, went to her employer and confessed. She could no longer live with herself because she knew what she was doing was wrong.

Interestingly enough, I had a call from a fellow the other day, and he was telling me how he stole equipment from where he was working. He was called into the office by the boss, and he was asked if he had stolen these items. The fellow said no. The boss said: okay; get back to work then. He said: no, I quit; you've called me a thief. After two months he wrote the boss a letter. This was when he was on social assistance, \$414 a month. He was in despair. He wrote his former boss a letter confessing that it was him. That particular boss chose not to lay charges. There are cases and cases like that, which we can hear over and over.

Broken homes. There was another call I received the other day. A grandmother called about her daughter. Her daughter is so addicted to the machines that no matter what she gets her hands on she takes to a pawnshop to raise money so she can play the machines. The Christmas gifts that the grandmother had bought for her grandchildren were taken by the mother to a pawnshop, her own children's gifts taken to a pawnshop and sold so that she could go play the VLTs. The grandmother, the next opportunity she knew that the daughter was playing the machines, went and took the children, the children who were abandoned because of the VLTs. She took those children, and now there is a family fight over who has custody of those children. That's what these machines will drive people to do, Mr. Speaker.

At a hotel here in Edmonton there are apparently two fellows that are selling \$150 emergency vouchers for \$30 so they can feed that money to the machines. These are not people that would normally act so stupid. They're acting out of control. They're acting because of an addiction that was created.

It's been proven over and over and over by experts that there is a high, high degree of addiction possibility to the machines. I think everybody on that side knows it. I don't think anybody denies that. It's a question of: is it worth accepting that money for the consequences? The minister says: well, they can take a plebiscite; they can take a petition. Mr. Speaker, were there plebiscites held to put the machines in? No. They were rammed

down the throats of the municipalities. The government here will most often take the position that matters don't have to go to plebiscite because we're responsible people that can make decisions on behalf of Albertans. Why can't councillors make decisions on behalf of their constituents, of their population, of their electorate, of their voters? Why can't Lethbridge? If the mayor down there decides he doesn't like the VLTs – which I understand he doesn't – why can't that council simply pass a motion and remove the VLTs from the city of Lethbridge? Why does it have to go to a plebiscite? That I don't understand. [interjection] It has to go to a plebiscite under the existing rules, unless the minister is telling me that a council can pass a motion. Then Sylvan Lake certainly would have passed that motion. They wouldn't bother going to a plebiscite. That council there is responsible. They know these machines are no good.

We look, Mr. Speaker, at the progression of these machines. It wasn't that many years ago that the minister from Barrhead – and very interesting comments he's made recently. I must say that I'm very, very impressed by his comments that he's made recently. He's become very, very enlightened. It's not that many years ago that he sat in this House and talked about the experimentation that was going to take place: a few machines here during Klondike Days and the Stampede. With the initial machines you dropped in quarters, and you got a slip out. You didn't get coins out; you got a slip. You took that to the bartender, the cashier, whoever, and you cashed that in. From there suddenly one day they were experimenting with dollar machines. Then they were experimenting with coin in and coin out. What do we see now? They are comparable to Las Vegas machines. What's next in this progression? Are the machines, Mr. Minister, going to be adapted so that people can feed in their credit cards and hit the maximum on their credit cards? Is the government going to go to that point before they realize the harm that they're doing?

Mr. Speaker, there are businesspeople that are talking about the hurt. In Lethbridge, for example, the businessmen are threatening if the machines are removed, but on the other hand, there is a great protest, which is growing, by the citizens against the VLTs. Lethbridge is one of the hot beds of opposition. Your miracle network channel down there is taking a keen interest in this whole issue. Your mayor is taking a keen interest. He's talked to people that have been devastated by these machines. A person in Lethbridge lost – what? – is it \$475,000 to the machines? Just tons and tons of money, thousands and thousands of dollars.

The businessmen, certainly I can sympathize that they want to raise money. What's this community all about? Alberta has a free enterprise system, no question about it, but businessmen have an obligation as well. They've got to look at the hurt they're creating when they raise this money. The spokesman down there in Calgary for the VLT operators, the association of VLT operators – what? – he controls 21 machines in three different bars; he controls 50 machines in a nonprofit casino. It's big bucks for him, but the consequences are not worth it. I can understand why he's going to fight and why other businessmen who control hotels and that are going to fight.

#### 4:10

It was a very interesting remark that the Minister of Municipal Affairs made, that the VLTs are good for the hotel industry because they're feeding a revenue-starving industry. Since when did government get into business to subsidize industries that they feel may be lacking in revenue? Government, I thought, had taken the position that they're not going to interfere in the

marketplace. There are other sectors of the business community that would sure like to be fed too. Maybe the government feels they have an obligation to them. Why just the hotels?

We often hear about the grants, how a portion of these dollars are going towards community efforts. When we had programs like the CRC program, the community recreation/cultural grant program, the preventative social services, and such, Mr. Speaker, before the introduction of VLTs, just with the other forms of lottery revenue more money was going to the community than is now from those lottery proceeds.

Under the original program introduced by the minister from Barrhead, the minister responsible at that time, more dollars went in. That was the era of the Samsonite personalized briefcases, which we all recall. Now there's less money being distributed to the community. At that time basically all the money that was raised from lotteries went back to the community. I remember the first year. There was a \$25 million surplus, and all joy broke out in the Legislative Assembly because there was \$25 million that could go into general revenue to help pay down the debt, do whatever. The government then said: well, we'll only give a certain limit to the municipalities, and all the rest is ours to use. With the introduction of the VLTs and the escalation of that revenue, did more of that revenue go to the municipalities? No. In the budget coming down there may be an attempt to satisfy the communities, to appease them, to buy them off, possibly, in the budget that we're going to hear a few hours from now, followed by the dropping of the writ. We'll hit that campaign trail tomorrow, and we'll be ready, Mr. Speaker. Possibly they will be distributing \$200 million to municipalities in an attempt to head off the opposition that is occurring.

Every member in this House realizes, when they go back to their constituents, that this is a hot issue. It's a hot issue because it sets up two types of parties: the government party, which is callous, which has no human compassion, no feelings for people that are hurt, which will stop at nothing to grab money; then, on the other hand, you have a group of individuals here that represents a party of compassion, a party that understands there are human values, that there are community values, that the community does not want to see society go to the dogs. They don't want to see the devastation that takes place. No person wants to see their neighbour hurt to the degree that they're being hurt. Nobody wants to see a brother or sister go down because of the machines. Basically, Albertans are decent people, extremely decent people, but this government has chosen not to show the common respect, the common decency in terms of community values. Mr. Speaker, I would hope that somewhere along the line this government will come to its senses, that they will recognize and admit that this is not the proper way to raise revenue: to abuse those that can least afford to be abused. It is abuse, knowingly taking money in such a way that it is causing hurt, and we all know it causes hurt.

So I would plead with this government to do the decent thing: remove these machines. If you've got to go to the Liberal policy to know what to do, don't be ashamed to go to the Liberal policy. Do it.

On that note I'll conclude. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by saying that time and time again we're faced with the opposition

coming forward with policies as in this particular Motion 501. They are absolutely out there dictating what they think is best for Albertans. This motion really brings forward more of that type of philosophy. What they're doing is telling Albertans that because 5 percent of the people may experience a gambling problem and are in trouble at one point or another – that's only 5 percent. What about the other 95 percent of us who lose the privilege of going to a particular facility and enjoying the recreation value of a video lottery terminal or enjoy going to a racetrack or the local community bingo and participating in some of the recreation that's around that?

This particular motion deals with video lottery terminals. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out – and we're not sure about his distinction between video lottery terminals and video slot machines – these machines do tragically affect people because they are a gambling machine. We have read in the newspapers and we've read articles and we've all heard stories – I heard them not only in my own constituency, but I heard them when I was going around the province with the Lotteries Review Committee – that there are indications out there that people have lost everything. Truly, my heart goes out to those people. It did when I was on the committee, and it also does when I sit across from these people in my office. We hear about them losing their homes. We hear about the effect that it has on their families. You know, what bothers me more than anything is that these people are embarrassed by this from time to time. They also lose their self-respect because they've put everything into these machines. I am really impressed by their courage. These people come forward, and they speak of it publicly. They come right out with a tremendous amount of candour and tell us of their problems.

That gives us an opportunity, Mr. Speaker. These people deserve our help; they deserve our understanding. Once we know that they need help and we understand that they have a problem, we can react to that. These people need a program so they can learn to live with their addiction.

My colleague the Member for Lacombe-Stettler hit the nail right on the head when she said that when the addiction exists, the tool itself is irrelevant. I heard a story not so long ago about a man who had a severe gambling problem. He had a problem with the VLTs, and he ended up losing everything. His friends went to him because they wanted to help him. When they went there and they talked to him, they found out that VLTs weren't his only problem. They weren't his only vice. They found that off-track betting and horse racing and greyhound racing were some of his biggest problems, and they found literature associated with other illegal forms of gambling. This is not a discriminatory addiction. It needs to be fed, and whatever form is available will do so. Obviously, removing VLTs from the picture would not help this man. Without help to overcome his addiction, he would simply turn to whatever tool was available. Like an alcoholic, the gambling addict must also learn how to say no, even when a VLT is staring him in the face. He must learn to live with his addiction because removing the temptation does not remove the urge.

4:20

There is a benefit to keeping VLTs out in the public instead of forcing them underground, as we have been shown happens when they're made illegal. Our friend lived for many years with his secret gambling life because he was able to be covert. That is a hard thing to do when you're in a small town, to have anonymity. His community had no legal gambling for many years, so he would wander off to other communities with many believable

excuses and indulge in his addiction. He would remain nameless, and he would remain faceless.

Once VLTs were introduced into the bars of this small town, people began to notice how often he frequented the establishments. They finally saw his trouble, and they took action. They pointed him in the direction of the help that he needed. Can our friend overcome his addiction? We can only hope and we can only pray that he will. I can tell you that I don't believe for a second that banning all VLTs in Alberta would make a difference to his recovery. If no VLTs, then no horse racing, no bingos, no lottery tickets, no pull tickets, no anything else.

[The Speaker in the Chair]

What makes the difference is the availability of the counseling that he needs and deserves. The government has made problem gambling a top priority for AADAC. We have increased the funding to AADAC by \$800,000 in the last three years in order to help this organization do research on the developed treatments for problem gambling. Their research has shown that 1.7 percent of gamblers have a serious problem. That is 1.7 percent too much, as far as I'm concerned. But we are all human. Some of us have a problem with gambling, some of us have a problem with alcohol, and some of us, like myself, have a problem with eating. I am a compulsive eater. I love the taste of food, and I have a tough time getting away from it. Sometimes I have to get a little help for that. [interjections] Yeah, I didn't fool anybody.

Where do we draw the line on government responsibility?

MRS. FORSYTH: We'll ban food.

MR. COUTTS: We'll ban food, yeah.

In a democratic society we do not need people leading people around by the hand. Personally, I resent that kind of interference in my life. What we do provide is a safe place for people when they run into trouble. This motion, Mr. Speaker, assumes all Albertans must be led around by the hand. I think you all know what they're saying about making assumptions.

I'd like to return to AADAC for just a moment. Besides the \$1.9 million in funding the government gives that organization for research and for programs, there is something less tangible but still vital: our support. That support means that people of this province can access the counseling services they need knowing the government understands their problem and knowing that the government wants to help. AADAC has become an absolute pillar of our community with all its programs. Hopefully, our support means that those who need to come to AADAC for gambling problems won't stick their heads in the sand because they feel ashamed. They know that AADAC is there, and they know that AADAC will help them and they will do it in confidentiality.

The government can be a leader. It can show Albertans that we take this problem seriously, and they know that we are willing to support the people who suffer from it, just like the tradition that AADAC has had over the last 40 years of helping people with their drug and their alcohol addictions. It also means that Albertans around this province, from all corners, can get the help when they need it because there are AADAC centres in all portions of this province. As a matter of fact, I have the Lander centre in my constituency that not only has helped people with alcohol and drug addiction problems but are now expanding into some gambling addiction programs for people, a very reputable

organization with concerned counselors who help the people that come there.

I know that everybody knows how good a job AADAC has done in the past. I also hope that everybody shares in the confidence I have that they will continue to provide excellent care to Albertans faced with addictions. Gambling is just one of the new parts of those kinds of addictions.

We must face the facts, Mr. Speaker. VLTs are a fact of life in this province. They are a fact of life in this country. They are a fact of life just across the border in Montana, where, when the province of Alberta didn't have VLTs and didn't have a lot of bingos, many southern Albertans were going and spending their weekends playing the poker machines and going to bingos down in Great Falls and taking all of this Alberta money down there.

Now, I think we have a responsibility to do one more thing for our people. Understand, Mr. Speaker, that a VLT is exactly what it is: a video lottery terminal. It is a machine. It is absolutely a machine that . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order, hon. members. Lower the level of sound a little bit, please. Order.

The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a machine that has a computer chip in it. It is mindless. The computer chip you have no control over, and why anyone would take their hard-earned dollar and drop it into a machine that is programmed I will never understand, but that is my choice. That is my choice.

MRS. FORSYTH: Like the food is.

MR. COUTTS: Just like the food is that I put into my mouth. That's right.

AADAC also tells us that the best way to help defeat addiction to VLTs is really tight government regulation and a joint concerted effort by government agencies, community groups, and individuals to help those folks that come up with a VLT or gambling addiction problem. We can't get rid of VLTs as a whole. All we can do is allow communities to set their own standards, to keep a close eye on the machines, and . . .

THE SPEAKER: I regret having to interrupt the hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod, but the time allotted for consideration of this business has expired.

4:30

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I've received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 1997, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 1998, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the 12 months ending March

31, 1998, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly. Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, before moving the motion, I am tabling Budget '97, which sets out the government's fiscal and business plan as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act.

head: **Budget Address**

12. Mr. Dinning moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, it is a rare pleasure for me to move the motion standing in my name on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about the provincial budget, people immediately think of money, but the budget is about more than money. It's about setting priorities, the right priorities, Albertans' priorities, and it's about building a better province. Instead of focusing on the dollars and cents, I want to talk with Albertans today about what this budget means to them.

My first message is a simple one. Alberta is back on top, and we have never been stronger. Balanced budgets, net debt cut in half, the lowest taxes in Canada, a growing and more diversified economy, more jobs and more Albertans working than ever before, a smaller and more focused government, citizens that are skilled, energetic and motivated: with those strengths, Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder proud Albertans are saying, "Nothing can stop us now."

The prize we set out to achieve, a solid financial foundation, that prize is now firmly in our grasp, and we aren't letting go. Now it's time to secure what we've achieved and build on it, time to put spending cuts behind us, to focus not just on what we spend but what we can achieve. That's what Budget '97 does. It keeps us on track with responsible spending, spending that's targeted at the right priorities, spending that achieves the kinds of results that Albertans expect. And that means a health system Albertans can count on, a health system that's there when they need it.

Budget '97 is also about education and training for our young people. It's about jobs and a thriving economy for our province. What we're talking about is building Alberta, a vibrant and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a superior quality of life, a province where people are confident about the future for themselves and for their children. That's our vision, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're working so hard to achieve, and that job is a constant work in progress.

Budget '97 is about responsible spending. With this budget Albertans will see an affordable plan for spending on priorities that are important to them. They'll see a government determined to stick to a responsible course, because every commitment in this budget is paid for. Every commitment fits into a balanced budget plan. Unlike the lofty promises made by others, there are no promises paid for with borrowed money, with future tax increases, or from selling off the heritage fund or from passing debt on to our children. Some members, Mr. Speaker, may want to lure Albertans to believe there are no limits on how much we can spend, but Albertans know better. They want solid, responsible management of their tax dollars, and that's exactly what they'll get from a Ralph Klein government.

With Budget '97 we're sticking with what works: spending that

we can afford, reinvesting savings in high-priority areas, continuing to search for better ways to get better results for the dollars that we spend, paying down the mortgage, doing all the same sensible things that Alberta families do when it comes to their own budgets.

Let me give you the financial highlights. First, Alberta has a balanced budget. We will never again present a deficit budget in this Assembly; that's the law in this province. This coming year Alberta will have a surplus of at least \$144 million. If volatile oil and gas prices and corporate tax revenues are higher than budgeted, the surplus could be higher. In fact, it could exceed \$800 million. And if those windfall revenues occur, if they come our way, every dollar of that surplus will go to pay down the debt. We'll start this year with a \$2.2 billion payment on our net debt. That's the surplus we expect at the end of March '97, and like every surplus in Alberta the law says it must go directly to the debt.

MR. KLEIN: Unless the Liberals want to break it.

MR. DINNING: Indeed, unless the Liberals would want to break it, Mr. Premier. That's not going to happen, because Alberta's net debt will be down to \$3.5 billion by next March, down from the peak of \$8.3 billion. We're on track to pay off the original 25-year mortgage in just nine years. When Alberta celebrates its 100th birthday in 2005, the net debt will be gone completely.

Because debt is going down, interest savings are going up. In fact, we're saving \$389 million in interest costs compared to what we spent in 1994, and this is where Albertans see the direct benefits of a responsible fiscal plan. Instead of going to bankers and bond traders, the money we're saving is being reinvested in programs that count the most for Albertans.

On the spending side we're looking at modest increases overall, keeping us on track and in control of our budget. Total spending will increase by 1.2 percent this year, to a total of almost \$14 billion. Spending on programs goes up by \$296 million this year, and the bulk of that money goes to Albertans' top priorities. Health and education now make up 63 percent of our total program spending, and that's up from 53 percent just five years ago. Mr. Speaker, we got our priorities right.

On the revenue side we all know that oil and gas prices are almost impossible to predict, and those prices have a huge impact on Alberta's revenues. That's why we continue to use conservative forecasts and build in protection in case things aren't as good as others expect. For this year we will budget Alberta's revenues at \$14.1 billion. For the sixth year in a row Albertans will see no increases in taxes and no new taxes. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has no sales tax, and under a Ralph Klein government, it will never have a sales tax.

**4:40**

For low- and middle-income working families taxes in fact are going down. By next year a one-income family with two children will pay no Alberta taxes until they earn \$24,500. For 130,000 families and 200,000 children in this province, that's the best news of all in today's budget. Those are the financial details.

Let me turn from the numbers to what's most important for Albertans, and that's health and education. Budget '97 means a health system that Albertans can count on. In November government announced the Action for Health package to reinvest in specific initiatives where Albertans expect to see real improvements in access to health services. We've listened to Albertans, listened when they said, "Assure me that the health system will be

there when I need it or when my children are sick." Albertans told us waiting times are too long. They said, "We need more nurses and frontline health workers." They want more services in communities and home care for those who need it. Albertans want to know the system is working well, not by throwing money at the problem but by spending money wisely and making sure the problems get fixed.

The Action for Health package responds directly to what Albertans said was important. With the actions we're taking, people can expect to see shorter waiting times for surgeries, more frontline staff, and predictable funding for regional health authorities. They can expect better information about health and a greater emphasis on staying healthy. With these actions Albertans have every reason to expect stability, to expect quality care, and to expect problems in health care to be fixed. Funding for health will increase by 3.4 percent this year. In total we'll spend over \$4 billion on health, more than any other area of government.

Budget '97 also means a strong focus on education. Albertans want our children to succeed and to be able to compete with the best in the world. As a former Minister of Education I can't tell you how proud I was last month when we learned that Alberta's 13 year olds and 16 year olds led the country in science achievements. Our grade 8 students ranked third in the world, tied with Japan. Those results are a tribute. They're a tribute to Alberta's hardworking teachers, they're a tribute to Alberta's hardworking students, and they're a tribute to those professionals who work so hard to develop the very best science curriculum in all of this country.

To me that success is what budgets are all about. They're not just about dollars and cents. They're a powerful combination of talent, effort, and resources devoted to achieving what's right and what's good, and with Budget '97 we're determined more than ever to keep working, to build more success stories for Alberta's students. This year our efforts are devoted to making sure more students finish high school. We're working with teachers to improve the achievement of students in math. We're putting more computers in schools to make sure students have access to information technology so that they enter the 21st century with 21st century skills.

We're working hard to improve the co-ordination of services to children, and we're providing additional funds for children with severe special needs. Spending for basic education will increase by 3.3 percent this year, to a total of \$2.8 billion. That's over \$5,000 invested this year alone in the education of every student in Alberta.

On the postsecondary side we're taking action to reward excellence in our universities, our colleges, and technical institutes and tie more of their funding to the results that they achieve. We're increasing financial assistance to students and investing \$40 million to improve facilities and equipment. Spending on postsecondary education and training will go up by 6.2 percent this year, for a total of \$1.16 billion. The new Canada/Alberta agreement provides an additional \$107 million for labour market programs.

Mr. Speaker, on top of investing in health and education, Albertans want to know that their government is spending their money where it can make a real difference for people and their communities. This year we're increasing funding for the Alberta seniors benefit by close to 11 percent. For Alberta seniors this means their government will spend \$180 million on one of the most comprehensive seniors benefits programs in all of Canada,

and we will keep working with seniors to make sure support is there for those who need it the most.

Alberta's social assistance programs will keep their strong focus on getting people back into the workforce and able to support themselves and their families. In total we'll spend almost \$700 million for income support programs. For some Albertans this means increases in shelter allowances. It means an increase in widows' pension benefits and an increase in benefits in the assured income for the severely handicapped. We'll shift the savings from reduced welfare caseloads to high-priority areas so we can expand support for disabled Albertans and deliver better services to our children.

With Budget '97 we're taking additional steps to support Alberta's communities. Currently our communities share in over \$51 million in revenues from lotteries. By next April an additional \$50 million will be shared with communities on a per capita basis. Community lottery boards will be in place to set priorities and decide how the additional funds should be spent.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Budget '97 means jobs and a growing Alberta economy. Our goal is a simple one: to build the right climate for growth in Alberta's economy so businesses and industries will prosper and so Albertans will see more jobs – good-paying, high-quality jobs. All the signs point to a broader and far more diversified economy than we've ever had in this province, and forecasters see Alberta leading the rest of Canada in economic growth. We have forecasted our growth this year at 3.6 percent. For Albertans that good news means jobs. More Albertans are working than ever before, and there appears to be no letup in that trend. In the last four years 157,000 jobs were created, and four out of every five new jobs are full-time jobs.

We're not stopping now, Mr. Speaker. We will keep working with the private sector to build on the Alberta advantage to create jobs and opportunities for young people here in their own home province. And as my good friend Paul Taylor always says, "They won't have to leave home to take on the world."

On the government side, Mr. Speaker, we're sticking to what we can do and do well: staying the course on our fiscal program, maintaining the lowest overall taxes in Canada, providing targeted tax reductions where they can make the most difference, expanding the focus on research and development, maintaining and improving Alberta's infrastructure, and helping build a highly skilled workforce that's up to the challenge.

Budget '97 means taxes on airline and railway fuel go down, down so that they enhance Alberta's competitive position. Taxes on machinery and equipment are down another 20 percent this year to stimulate investment and job growth, and all the signs are again that it is working. We're looking at major plant expansions and new investments across this province, investments that will create jobs for Albertans.

As part of Budget '97 we're taking steps to expand the focus on research and development. We're investing \$5 million in the science and research fund to kick start new strategic research and development initiatives. [interjections] That's right. We're doing that, Mr. Speaker, so leading edge ideas will turn into leading edge products and services.

In agriculture we'll keep pushing to expand Alberta's agrifood industry. We'll establish the new agra value added corporation to get new products into the marketplace, and that means good news for farmers.

With exports leading Alberta's economy, we will move ahead with plans to build a safe, efficient trade corridor from Grande Prairie in the north to Coutts at the United States border. For

Alberta's export businesses, for truckers and transporters this means getting goods to U.S. markets quickly and efficiently. For people in rural Alberta it means a safer way to get from Grande Prairie to Fox Creek or from Fort Macleod to Coumts. For people living in our cities it means safer interchanges to keep traffic flowing and keep transport trucks off city streets.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, that's Budget '97 in a nutshell.

I said at the outset that I wanted to talk with Albertans about what this budget means to them. It means a health system they can count on. It means better results in education, more students staying in school and achieving the success that they deserve. It means more money spent on benefits for Alberta's seniors, better programs for children, for disabled Albertans, and for Albertans working hard to get a leg up so they can support themselves and their families. For thousands of Alberta families it means more money left in their pockets. For communities it means sharing lottery revenues. For businesses it means a chance to grow and expand right here in Alberta with a government that stays the responsible fiscal course, sticks to what it does best, opens doors and creates the right climate for growth. For Alberta's young people this budget means hope, hope that jobs will be there when they're ready to take them on. For all Albertans it means a deliberate and affordable plan, a plan that builds on our strong financial foundation, a plan that keeps building this province, building a future for all of us.

As I stand here today, I naturally look back on the past four years, and the message that I want to leave with Albertans is this one: thank you; you were right. Four years ago when we told you the straight goods about the province's fiscal situation, you told us to get on with it, to act now and act fast to balance the budget. We promised Albertans we would do that, and we kept that promise.

A year ago you told us to keep paying down Alberta's debt, reinvest savings to make sure our children get the best education and so that our health system is there when you need it. And you were right. You know what's best for your province, and you've never been shy about telling your government what needs to be done. A good government, the Ralph Klein government, will always follow your lead.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is back on solid ground. We're stronger than ever, and, yes, we're a little wiser than we were before. We're firmly grounded in the right priorities, and we are determined to stay the course.

I'll close today on a personal note. I've had the honour of being a Member of the Legislative Assembly for 11 years. That's a special honour that the people of Alberta bestow on all of us, all of us who serve in this Chamber, and I want to thank the people of Calgary-Lougheed for that honour, Mr. Speaker. Over those 11 years I've had the privilege of working with you, sir, and with my colleagues in this Chamber. I've also had the good fortune to work with a talented cast of public servants, professional men and women with wisdom and ideals and a zeal to make a difference, to make Alberta a better place. I want to say a special thank you

to my colleagues and especially to so many people I've worked with over the years. Finally, I want to say thank you to members of my family, who've been at my side since day one.

I always knew that I would turn a corner and this day would be right in front of me, but that doesn't mean I'm any better prepared for the turmoil of mixed emotions. Gratitude, gratitude for the honour and the privilege of serving Albertans and helping guide the province's finances. Pride, pride for what has been accomplished. Hope, hope that Alberta's future is brighter than ever, that the 21st century will indeed belong to Albertans. And confidence, confidence that the leadership of this province is in good hands, the capable hands of Ralph Klein.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I beg leave to adjourn debate, I want to say thank you to my fellow Albertans, and I want to say thank you to Premier Ralph Klein.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Provincial Treasurer has moved that debate be now adjourned on Motion 12. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Carried.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the hon. Provincial Treasurer for a very good, well-rounded, sensible speech. When Mr. Dinning first came to me, we weren't exactly on the same side in the leadership race. But after I won that race, he said to me: Ralph, if you'll give me the chance, I will be the best Treasurer you've ever had. That has turned out to be true.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise you and the members of the House that earlier today I met with His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, and as we speak, the Provincial Secretary is having the necessary documentation signed by His Honour which effects the issuance of the writs of election, now effectively dissolving the 23rd Legislature and allowing us to hold a general election on March 11, 1997.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, that announcement leaves very little more to be said, but I would like to say that I have appreciated the competence of all members of this Assembly over the last period of time, since August 30, 1993. I want to wish each and every one of you the utmost of success in whatever is going to be forthcoming in the ensuing 28 days. I wish you all the best.

It's hard to adjourn a House that's been dissolved, so therefore I think it's time for the Chair to take its leave and wish everybody the best. [applause]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.]