

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 16, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Though we as legislators of this great province and its people are taken from the common people and selected by You to be architects of our history, give us wisdom and understanding to do Your will in all we do. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly several members of the Camrose Kodiaks junior hockey team. Obviously most members realize that last weekend they won the Canadian junior hockey championship. They're visiting the Legislature today, and just a few minutes ago they were guests of the Minister of Community Development and myself, and many of my colleagues here in the Legislature were also present, so I want to thank them for that. Many of them have left, of course, for the summer, but many of them decided to come to the Legislature to view what's going on before leaving for the summer. It's my pleasure at this time to introduce them. Of course they're sitting in the Speaker's gallery.

First of all, Erik Lodge from Red Deer, Dan Day from Consort, Tyler Bullick from Coronation, Matt Ponto from Galahad, Richard Petiot from Daysland, Mark Robinson from Okotoks, Greg Prusko from Camrose, Jason Kenyon from Coaldale, Brett Osness from Calgary, Darrell Stoddard from Red Deer, Brad Wanchulak from Edson, James Willis from Paradise Valley, Craig Perry from Elnora, Mark Masters from Leduc, Mark Szott from Camrose, Ryan Edwards from Ponoka, Scott Galenza from Camrose, and Joel Williams from Grande Prairie. Accompanying the group is the general manager and coach, Boris Rybalka, and the past president of the Camrose Sport Development Society, Lorne Broen, and my summer student constituency assistant, Anthony Leoni. I know that we will extend our usual warm welcome and along with that our congratulations as well.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I am presenting a petition on behalf of 95 Alberta residents who respectfully request that the attached petition be considered. It's all about the grizzly bear hunt in the spring and orphan grizzly cubs. They would like to suspend the hunting of female grizzlies in the spring.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. OUELLETTE: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I have a tabling of a letter from the Chinook's Edge school division, and I have the copies here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to tabled five copies of the Conference Board of Canada report and news release as well as copies of two newspaper articles on the report's finding. The Conference Board reports that "Alberta's growth rate will outpace all other Canadian provinces this year," thanks to a number of positive factors including our tax cuts. The report states that Alberta is in a class of its own, with both the goods and services industries absolutely thriving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to be able to table seven copies of Making Sure It's Safe. It's a brochure on Alberta's drinking water. In light of Walkerton, North Battleford, and some other instances we feel it's necessary to put this out to the public. Every MLA will receive 100 copies of this in their offices either today or tomorrow. It answers important questions like: "Is it OK for hikers and backpackers to drink water from streams or lakes?" "Is it okay to use hot water for cooking?"

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table for the benefit of all Members of the Legislative Assembly a discussion paper entitled Imports/ Exports – Issues and Options. It's dated May 8, this year, and it is produced by the Power Pool of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table today five copies of the program from the DARE graduation at Our Lady of Victories school last night in Edmonton. It was delightfully done.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's the Backgrounder, an analysis done by the Alberta Teachers' Association on the provincial budget relative to education. In part it states that "the Alberta government's assertion that Alberta teachers will be the highest paid teachers in Canada does not hold up to even minimal scrutiny."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling. It is a letter from Mrs. Shirley Ramsay, the reeve of Lacombe county, addressed to the Premier, encouraging him and his colleagues to defeat – and I assume hoist is an alternative – Bill 205.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to

table five copies of a brochure produced by the Elder Advocates of Alberta entitled What is Elder Abuse?

Thank you very much.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce two good friends. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Don Hyde, a chartered accountant from Calgary and my chief financial officer during the past election. With Don is Peter Graham, a self-proclaimed fresh air inspector from Ottawa, which he says there isn't a lot of there. I would ask Don and Peter to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 35 members of St. Gabriel Cyber school in St. Albert. There are 35 in the group today: two teachers and 15 students, who are accompanied by several of their parents. The teachers are Miss Kara Zutz and Mr. Bernie Hryciw. They are seated in the gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 11 really keen and inquisitive students from the social 10 class at NorQuest College. They are seated in the members' gallery today, and they're accompanied by their instructor, Ms Elaine Nichols. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 46 people who have made the trip up from Duchess, Alberta. There are 30 grade 6ers, accompanied by 13 parents and three teachers. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

1:40

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Sex Offender Programs

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by commending the government for undertaking to establish the sex offender registry. Such a registry not only tracks the aftermath of an offence, where there's already been a victim, but prevention must also be considered. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier also commit to increased funding to preventative programs across the province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we aren't making any commitments yet. I do appreciate, however, the suggestions of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. We will await the report of the Solicitor General, and at that time we'll decide as a government what course of action to take. But I do appreciate the valid and constructive advice of the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also commit to supporting programs like MarCon Associates in Lethbridge, who used to provide psychological treatment services to offenders but have stopped because of lack of funding?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is in place right now on a provincial level and what is being done in other correctional institutions, but I will have the hon. minister respond if she has anything further to add.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. These are all things that we will be looking at and considering within the next couple of weeks. Again, I acknowledge his support of the program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also take steps to move beyond tracking offenders and empower programs in Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, and across the province who are helping to educate the public and children on the awareness and identification of potential offenders?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has hit one of the nails squarely on the head. It's important to remember that a pedophile registry is only another police tool. It doesn't guarantee the security of children nor does it replace commonsense safety precautions. Certainly, education relative to the avoidance of the tragedy that occurred in Lethbridge is an important component of the total program.

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

Water Quality Monitoring

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent tests on Bellshill Lake by Hardisty show that water in this lake is not fit for human or animal consumption. The total coliform count was too numerous to even count. The total dissolved solids were almost double the allowance for cattle consumption and three and a half times the limit for human consumption. This lake feeds into the Battle River. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Does your department identify and monitor agricultural point-source pollution, considering that's the easiest way that we can look at water pollution and identify those points and control it when it gets into our water supply?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we have taken, I think, a very proactive role in this by initiating a groundwater study in southern Alberta where we were concerned about the level of possible leaching into groundwater and consequently also into our streams from livestock operations.

On the issue of the testing of our lakes, I would ask that the hon. Minister of Environment fill you in because we work very closely on the testing of water bodies and the possible contamination from agricultural sites.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safe drinking water and safe water generally is a very important topic to all Albertans, and we do constantly monitor drinking water sources. We just had meetings in my office this morning about the monitoring of a particular source and how we monitor it. We will continue to improve our monitoring and toughen our standards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment then. He talked about monitoring and dealing with the issue of drinking water sources in Alberta. These are basically open bodies of water where people do frequent. How much monitoring goes on, and what level of public knowledge and information is provided so that they can be aware of the quality of water in these kinds of bodies, which may not necessarily be drinking sources?

DR. TAYLOR: Obviously, public education is a very important issue that we're involved with. The pamphlet I tabled in the House today is one step in public education that indicates what we're doing and where we're going with this. Certainly where there are algae blooms and different things in lakes, we are prepared, as we're aware of these issues, to indicate to the public by notification of no swimming, that you shouldn't swim there, and to put on swimming bans and so on.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we need to do is get out the information on these point sources. How is the minister dealing with that kind of thing when there is actually a documented case above the human consumption safety levels? Are you advertising that? How do you get it out that these places are no longer safe for human consumption?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, certainly I'm personally not aware of the particular case he referred to, but the general procedure is to notify the public of unsafe conditions. We would take an ad in the newspaper perhaps or do some radio advertising. But it's our general practice to notify the public in appropriate ways.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I just wanted to offer a little bit of supplementary information from Agriculture's point of view on the water quality monitoring and inform the hon. member that we are currently monitoring 23 sites in the province that are influenced by agricultural practices. If he would like to have some more information on that program – it is ongoing – I'd be pleased to share it with him.

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

Conflict of Interest Legislation

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public trust should be an open trust. In the next two years the Conflicts of Interest Act comes up for review. My first question to the Premier: will the government commit to a full and open examination of the role of third-party expense and income funds for MLAs in its review of the Conflicts of Interest Act?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether that will be looked at relative to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Really it's a party matter. You know, members' disclosure statements that are required

by the Ethics Commissioner clearly indicate and are available for all to see. Relative to my disclosure statement it says: the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, leader's expense. Under the statement filed by the former leader of the Liberal Party, Mrs. MacBeth – she filed a disclosure statement as of April 15, 2000 – under leader's expenses it says: Alberta Liberal Party expenses. Exactly as it says in my disclosure statement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then will the government commit to ensuring that the Conflicts of Interest Act is revised to require that details be disclosed on the size of such funds?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is a private fund. It has nothing to do with government. It has absolutely nothing to do with government. We are not asking the Liberals to disclose any details of a Liberal leader's expense, if indeed one exists today. I understand the party is broke and they have no money. It could very well be that this leader does not have a leader's expense, but I can assure you that the former leader did have and disclosed so in her disclosure statement. This is a party matter. Party matters have no place in this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the government commit to ensuring that third-party funds for expenses and third-party funds for income are reported separately?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is a requirement under the members' disclosure statement rules to disclose income from all sources. Relative to my own disclosure statement and I'm sure relative to the hon. member's disclosure statement, he is disclosing, I would hope, all income from all sources. I don't know if he's still getting an income from the University of Alberta or whether he's drawing a pension, but if he is, I would assume that he is disclosing that, as required by law. There already is a law in place to require all Members of the Legislative Assembly to disclose income from all sources. I have done so, and I assume the hon. member has done so. I hope he has anyway.

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

1:50

Teachers' Salaries

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has chosen to embark on a path that's a recipe for labour strife with the province's teachers. In so doing, the government has set up an unwanted fight between teachers and school boards by forcing boards to choose between improving teachers' salaries and improving classroom conditions. My question is to the Premier. How can the government justify launching an aggressive public relations campaign which incorrectly claims that Alberta's teachers will be the highest paid in the country when in fact at least four Ontario school boards already have settlements which will see their teachers earn \$3,000 to \$4,000 more than the projected maximum in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly do want to achieve having our teachers be at least amongst the best paid in the country. Relative to where we are and where we might be going, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about the Alberta teachers being the highest paid in Canada, we are talking about a weighted average. I don't believe that it's fair to cherry-pick four boards from Toronto. Indeed, when you take the average across the country, what you soon find out is that our teachers will be the highest paid with the 6 percent.

The hon. member also made a point about us pitting the teachers against the school boards and having to choose. Mr. Speaker, for the last 60 years or 70 years or perhaps indeed 100 years that there have been school boards in existence in Alberta and that they have been receiving funding from the provincial government, those are the decisions that have been forced to be made by the school boards. They would receive a per student grant, and out of that per student grant they would have to decide: should we give money to teachers for teachers' salaries, or should we put money in the classroom? This has been there for the last 80 or 100 years. This is nothing new.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier again: what's the point of including a budget line for teachers' salaries if not to push them towards provincewide bargaining? Is that what's being intended?

MR. KLEIN: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, that is not being contemplated, at least not at this time, and I don't know if it will be in the future. It's in the budget as a line item simply because we want to give the teachers some assurance that the least they can get is 6 percent. There's also another line in the budget that clearly indicates or implies that school boards will have the flexibility to negotiate higher if they deem that that is the appropriate place for the money to go.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier: how can the government's apparent decision to impose provincewide bargaining on teachers be interpreted except as an attempt to provoke teachers into mounting a provincewide response?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the statement is not correct in any way, shape, or form. This government is not contemplating now provincewide bargaining for teachers, and I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We are not looking at provincewide bargaining. Basically what we're saying is that we value teachers. During the election campaign every member of this Assembly heard a lot about class size issues. What we heard about was class size. We also wanted to ensure that our teachers were fairly compensated and got a minimum raise, and included in this budget is a minimum raise of 6 percent. Each school board has its priorities. They are entitled to negotiate with the teachers, which is why this is not provincial bargaining. They are entitled to negotiate with the teachers on the other 3 and a half percent. I value the school board's authority, I value the school board's flexibility, and I value their ability to determine what the priorities are for their particular school jurisdiction. That is what we have done in this budget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Seniors' Health Care

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people in the province

of Alberta are indeed very fortunate to have had the services and dedication of so many productive citizens over the last few decades. Our quality of life today reflects the hard work and unselfish commitment of these people, many of whom are today Alberta's seniors. My question to the Minister of Seniors: why do we appear to discriminate against some seniors by requiring them to pay Alberta health care premiums, given that all of them contributed so much to our success?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First let me explain that the seniors' benefit program was introduced in 1994. It was based on the principle that those who can pay should pay towards the costs of programs and services. The program also provides for a cash benefit for people who are in need.

With respect to the premiums specifically, any single senior with an annual income of \$23,000 or less does not pay any health care premiums. There's a partial premium up until they make some \$25,700. Above that, they pay the full premium. With respect to senior couples, Mr. Speaker, senior couples that earn \$37,100 or less do not pay any health care premium. Between \$37,000 and \$42,000 they pay a partial premium.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, some 60 percent of the seniors in this province receive some support or total support for health care premiums.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, the second question to the same minister: can the minister reveal the dollar amount that Alberta seniors contribute to health care premiums?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the exact amount, but I believe it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$60 million plus. That money, I might point out, does not come into the Seniors ministry but goes directly into general revenue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Again to the same minister: will this government consider a program to allow seniors' health care premiums to be optional, allowing those that can afford to pay if they choose?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, we have been doing reviews of all the seniors' programs, and I do thank the member for this current suggestion. With respect to premiums, I've just had one good idea. Thank you very much.

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

Inland Cement Limited

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were told in this past recent election that if they voted Conservative, they would get representation and have their voices heard. Now the Environment minister is lining up with industry and saying: trust us; burning more coal won't hurt you and your family. That doesn't sound like real representation to me. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. In the Department of Environment's 2001-2004 business plan one of the desired results is for approval services to maintain high client satisfaction. Mr. Minister, who are the clients here: corporate interests or public health?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the clients in Alberta are all Albertans, including the member of the opposition that just asked the question. It includes all Albertans. It includes companies. It includes individual citizens.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that the Inland coal conversion project will lead to higher dust and fly ash fallout, how does the minister know that public health won't be impacted if he doesn't do an EIA?

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, the assumption in the question is wrong. The project will in all likelihood, as was pointed out by some independent scientists the other night at a meeting, lead to lower dust.

2:00

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, his assumptions are incorrect. Why won't this minister call a full environmental impact study, get all of the data open and accountable so Albertans can review this particular project? What is he afraid of? Just call an EIA.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, she has a misunderstanding of what an EIA is. An EIA is not a decision-making process. An EIA is an information gathering process, and before any of it starts, we have a screening process that is an information gathering process. After the screening process we can go do an EIA or an environmental review, and an environmental review is also an information gathering process. We will use the appropriate information gathering process to get all the information we need and protect her health and all the public's health.

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

Cottonwood Campground

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Foster Parent Association is an active and dedicated volunteer-driven group that provides special services for children in care. The activities undertaken include everything from social skill development to recreational gatherings and camping experiences. Recently, however, the AFPA was notified that their lease agreement regarding Cottonwood campground was being terminated. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Can the minister tell us about the agreement that is or was in place for the campground operated by the Alberta Foster Parent Association?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can. In 1997-98 we did try to find a private facility operator for the Dickson Dam-Cottonwood PRA. Unfortunately, none were forthcoming, so that particular campground and PRA were offered to the county of Red Deer. They were unable to take up the offer, so the Alberta Foster Parent Association stepped up and said that they were looking for a summer campground to operate. We entered into a one-year lease agreement with them in 1999 on the understanding that it would be renewed on an annual basis if possible, and they were well aware of that. Subsequently it was renewed one additional year in the year 2000, and after that the agreement would lapse, within a few weeks in fact. So that's the history of the agreement itself.

MR. OUELLETTE: Can the minister tell us the specifics that resulted in the decision regarding the renewal?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the area that we're talking about is actually what you might refer to as a potential floodplain, so part of the specifics that were included in that agreement was a cautionary note with respect to that eventuality of possible flooding in the area, which is why we review that lease agreement on an annual basis – at least we have done so in the past – to ensure that the level of the Gleniffer Lake reservoir isn't at a dangerous level. We will continue to put in that proviso. In fact, we will do it under the special permit that we've just issued them to go ahead with their awareness day weekend, which is coming up in a few days.

MR. OUELLETTE: So this situation leaves the Foster Parent Association without a site to provide a very appreciated facility. Will the minister reconsider the needs of the Alberta Foster Parent Association?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly very sensitive to the needs of a wonderful group like the Alberta Foster Parent Association, and I have spoken with the Minister of Children's Services about this matter as well. In fact, just yesterday I spoke with the president and chairman of the Alberta Foster Parent Association, and I assured them that we would not displace their program during this coming year. In fact, we're going to extend that lease for a six-month period beyond June 1 and allow them to provide these important services with special conditions that they will be soon made aware of, because we are concerned about the safety of the children in their care. It's a wonderful program, and I will also commit to the member and to the AFPA to help them find a more permanent solution for the long term.

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

Water Quality Monitoring

(continued)

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Environment has spent some time over the past few weeks assuring us that we have safe drinking water in this province, yet we have just heard that Bellshill Lake, which drains into the Battle River, is three and a half times over the limit for human consumption. To the Minister of Environment: how can your department not be aware of this contamination site?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just received this. Somebody from the opposition sent this to me in the House today. I commit that we will look at it and get them the information that they need. The fact that I don't personally know about this example does not mean my department is not aware of it. In fact, I will guarantee you that my department will be aware of this issue. So to suggest that we're not aware of the issue is totally inappropriate.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what assurances does the minister have for those people who live downstream on the Battle River that their water is safe to drink?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, all communities have to have a treatment facility. If it's coming through a treatment facility, they have legislation that they have to meet. They have monitoring they have to meet. We do random inspections. As well, they must have a certified operator running their treatment facility. If they are getting it from wells or dugouts – in my area we get water from dugouts – then we make the availability to individuals like that to

have their water tested to see if it's good or to see what kind of condition their water is in.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: does this level of contamination mean that your department's monitoring and reporting policies are not working?

DR. TAYLOR: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. It means obviously either he's misinformed or intentionally misleading, one or the other. For accepted Canadian drinking water standards we are one of two provinces that have more stringent water treatment standards than the Canadian drinking water standards. We have in Alberta the safest water in Canada.

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

Waterton Lakes National Park Development

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans value great economic development, and also we value the enjoyment of our natural heritage. A constituent of the Calgary-Fort riding, also the vice-chair of the Alberta Conservation Association, has voiced to me his concern about the development of the eastern border of Waterton Lakes national park. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister explain to us the process of approval for that particular development as it relates to the provincial and municipal authorities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House that in fact Cardston county followed the process as per the land use bylaw in accordance with the Municipal Government Act, and in fact they've had public hearings pertaining to this issue. This is truly and solely a municipal responsibility which they are following in accordance with the Municipal Government Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My supplemental question, the only one, is to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for parks and recreation. Could the minister update us briefly on the policy to ensure the protection of our natural parklands?

THE SPEAKER: Very briefly, hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, very briefly, Mr. Speaker, this program really had its genesis back in the late '80s and early '90s, when our current Premier was Minister of Environment. A study was undertaken then to begin the process to designate certain parts of the province as special protected areas. I believe 1.3 million hectares or thereabouts have already been designated, including 76 over the last few years, and we've got about five areas left to go that we're still looking at. The program is well under way, and I think the residents of this province will be well pleased when those results flow in sometime I hope later this year.

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

Western Canada Protocol on Education

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The western Canada

protocol is raising serious concerns. Upper grade content is being moved to lower grades, rendering resource collections gathered by schools over many years and at great cost obsolete. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Will there be additional funds for schools to provide resources for topics that are being moved from one grade to another?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

2:10

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In talking to the school boards, they have raised this issue, and consistently what the school boards have asked me to do is not to envelope funds for specific areas. So, yes, there is extra money. As the hon. member knows, we increased the budget for school boards this year by \$250 million, and there is money available.

The hon. member has actually touched upon a very good question, and that good question is the whole idea of curriculum and how we change curriculum. I will let the hon. member know that we're exploring what is called the evergreening of curriculum, where we will almost consistently be changing it on the computer, on the Internet, and I believe that this will indeed solve a lot of the issues that have been brought forward about teacher supplies, about curriculum-based supplies. That's the direction we're going, and I believe it will solve all the issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what steps are being taken to ensure that protocol changes will not repeat the problems that we've had with the high school mathematics program?

DR. OBERG: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked a very good question. Since I've become the minister, over the last two years I've probably heard the issue about mathematics somewhere in excess of a thousand times, indeed many of them actually from my side as well. We are working hard on the mathematics, and we have achieved what we have set out to achieve. It has taught us a lot of very important issues. A lot of very important answers have come from that because we did make mistakes in the institution of the mathematics curriculum.

One of the things, as I've already alluded to, that we're moving toward is the evergreening of the curriculum, where we will be changing small amounts of it continually so that we will keep it up as well as not having the massive change that occurred when we changed the mathematics program. This is something that my department works hard on and, indeed, is planning for the next seven, eight, and nine years on how to change the upcoming curriculum.

Just as a complete aside, Mr. Speaker, the English curriculum in high school has not been changed for – get this – 20 years.

DR. MASSEY: It says something about good literature.

To the same minister: given that the protocol is becoming a patchwork with the withdrawal of British Columbia and Alberta from the high school work, is the project still viable?

DR. OBERG: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I still feel that the project is viable, and indeed I feel the project is laudable. We can't be having people that are moving from Saskatchewan to Alberta, from Manitoba to Alberta – and, yes, there may even be the odd person in Alberta who moves to Saskatchewan – completely unknowing about the curricu-

lum. So I believe that it is certainly a laudable cause, and we will continue to work with our western partners on the western Canada protocol. I will assure you and I will assure the hon. member that the needs and issues of Albertans come first when it comes to curriculum, and we will do what we have to do and what we need to do to change the curriculum in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Conflict of Interest Court Case

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The very long list of unanswered questions on the Jaber affair got a little longer this week. On Monday the Premier said that a deal between the Crown and Mr. Naqvi had been made which resulted in the Crown obtaining his testimony.

MR. NORRIS: What's your question?

MR. MASON: On Tuesday the Premier changed his story and said that it was an arrangement.

MR. NORRIS: Question.

MR. MASON: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, will you please deal with that unruly member over there?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: There's a synergy that exists between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands and the hon. Minister of Economic Development, who's couched behind the hon. Minister of Government Services. I do not know the history of this great affection between the two hon. members, but it seems to envelop itself in this Assembly on occasion. So let's make a deal. Let's all work together; okay? When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands speaks, hon. Minister of Economic Development, you go shush. When the hon. Minister of Economic Development speaks, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you button it, and then life will be good.

Please proceed.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept the deal.

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

MR. MASON: Will the Premier tell the House exactly what he meant when he described this as an arrangement as opposed to a deal which had been made between the Crown and Mr. Naqvi?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I answer the question – and I'm really not going to; I'm going to have the Justice minister and Attorney General answer the question. You know, what's so disappointing about this member and the questioning is that it has nothing to do with public policy. You know, we're dealing with a serious issue such as drought. We're dealing with the ongoing issues of education and health. We're dealing right now as best we can with the anguish and pain of a Lethbridge family. We're dealing also with the good news relative to the Conference Board of Canada, the Minister of Finance. These are all big-picture issues that are of absolute importance to Albertans, and all this member can talk about is the Jaber case, which has been investigated, which has been prosecuted and a conviction obtained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: I'm sorry. I thought the Attorney General was going to answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we've now been four minutes. Please proceed.

MR. MASON: Will the Premier tell the House, Mr. Speaker, the details of this so-called deal or arrangement?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question I will refer to the Justice minister and Attorney General.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason why we referred to the situation as an arrangement rather than a deal is for exactly the reason this member is bringing it up, for clarity in the public mind. When people in the public hear the term "deal," they assume that there has been some concession granted or some immunity granted. That has not been the case in this situation.

What's happened in this situation as in many, many investigations and certainly investigations of this kind is that they need co-operation from one of the people who knows what went on in order to prosecute the other. In this case a strategic decision was made by the investigators in conjunction, presumably, with the prosecutors that the charges should be pursued against the government official, that that was the serious situation. They obtained as part of the investigation what is called an unwarned statement from the other person involved in this situation.

An unwarned statement is just that. Because the person is not given the usual warnings about how a statement can be used against them in a court of law and the rights that surround it, that statement cannot be used against that person. No concession has been made to anyone with respect to whether charges will be laid or could be laid. If investigations show that there were additional facts or if other facts come forward upon which a charge could be based, facts which if proven would lead to a conviction, then charges could be laid.

No immunity, no deal, but appropriate investigation techniques to get the information where it can be obtained from and used appropriately in a court of law.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then I would ask the Minister of Justice and Attorney General whether or not the statements made by Mr. Naqvi in response to the Crown prosecutor are in accordance with what we just heard from the minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, there is no deal in terms of the process. Normally one understands a deal to be somebody getting something; a usual case of this, immunity from prosecution. No immunity from prosecution has been offered. No deal has been made with the gentleman named. What has happened is that the investigators have taken an unwarned statement from the individual. That unwarned statement and that individual's testimony and co-operation in providing evidence in someone else's trial at law cannot be used against that person as evidence. If charges are to be laid against anyone else, then other evidence will have to be collected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:20

Workplace Safety

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about a good-news story in Alberta. The good news is that school is out for many of our university and college students, and it will soon be out for many of our high school students, and that means there'll be 150,000 students across Alberta looking for summer jobs. Now, as the chairman of the Council on Workplace Safety I know that workers younger than 25 years old are 17 percent more likely to be injured and workers with less than six months on the job are three times as likely to be injured. Now, that's not a good-news thing. Would the Minister of Human Resources and Employment tell us what his department is doing to ensure the safety of our young workers looking for summer work?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, as you can appreciate, with that number of young people coming into the workforce, it does require a response certainly on behalf of employers, on behalf of fellow employees, and then of course from us in Human Resources and Employment that have a mandate to provide for workplace health and safety.

As it relates to young workers, there are three areas that we're currently quite involved in. The first one that I would mention is that along with Alberta Learning we have what we call a job safety skills curriculum – of course, this is going into the high schools – and we're dealing there with grades 7 to 12, working on personal safety, on workplace safety, and of course safety systems management. By way of statistics and to give us some benchmarking on this, Mr. Speaker, in 1995 we were working with four schools and 19 students. Today in this particular program we're working with 450 schools, and I'm briefed that there are now 10,600 students that are involved. So we understand that this isn't a quick fix necessarily, but it's certainly getting them off to a good start.

The second program is one that we are collaborating on with the Workers' Compensation Board, and it's called Heads Up. Really it's directed at young and inexperienced workers, and the idea there is to get them concerned about their safety and then asking questions.

Of course the third one, our Youth Connections program, which I've mentioned many times here, does have information on workplace rights, responsibilities, safe work practices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many oil field companies in my riding, and they look forward to hiring these summer students. I'm just wondering: will these employers now need permits for young workers?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, again, in terms of permits it depends on age. If we have situations where the young person is actually an adolescent – and this means that they would be aged 12, 13, or 14 – then they do require a permit, and they have to make application to employment standards to satisfy us that the environment in the workplace that the young worker would be going into would not be injurious to the life, health, education, or as a matter of fact the welfare of the adolescent. In many cases, in fact I would say most, we'd also require the written permission of the parent.

Now, just so we don't start getting lots of calls on this, I might add that we can employ adolescents without permits if they're involved in what we call small ware delivery: if it is newspaper or flyer delivery, office clerks, or retail clerks. But if they're involved in any sort of construction area, it's unlikely that we would support a permit to a person less than age 15.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you. My second supplemental to the same minister. So, then, how can workers or employers find out a little more detail about the programs for young workers?

MR. DUNFORD: We're very proud, Mr. Speaker, of a couple of services that we have put in place. We're using taxpayer funds to do this, but we think it's a responsible way that we try to balance taxpayer funding against the needs and the wishes of the workplace. We have a safety call centre number – and if I could read that into the record, it's 1-866-415-8690 – or they could visit the workplace health and safety web site, which is www.whs.gov.ab.ca.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Hub Oil Company Ltd.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early August of 1999 Hub Oil exploded in Calgary, tragically killing two workers. My first question this afternoon is for the Minister of Environment. What studies are currently being conducted by the department to ensure that there is public safety and that soil requirements are being measured? What tests are currently being done by the Department of Environment on the Hub Oil site?

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, as the member knows, the Hub Oil case is right now in front of the court system, and I cannot comment as Minister of Environment on that court case or what's happening surrounding that court case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is the minister's department currently conducting long-term studies on the plant site and in the residential neighbourhoods regarding emissions that are toxic to the citizens of southeast Calgary?

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the regional health authority in the city of Calgary was involved in some follow-up work that was done. Also, during my time as Minister of Environment my recollection was that soil studies were conducted at the time of the emissions at Hub Oil and at the time of the fire. To the best of my recollection, those tests which were conducted demonstrated that the soil was safe at the time and that the proper remediation was done on the soil and all the residences in the area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question this afternoon is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is the Department of Municipal Affairs through the Safety Codes Council conducting any studies or any tests regarding the explosion that occurred at Hub Oil?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this House that clearly the council is working very closely with stakeholders and many groups pertaining to this important issue. I can assure the member that much of the review that is going on is intended to be, again, in the best interests of all Albertans.

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

Minimum Wage Workers

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that some of my constituents are having difficulty making ends meet, what with higher rental and living costs. Can the Minister of Human Resources and Employment tell us how many low-income families are living on the province's minimum wage?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we won't have exact numbers, but I think we can probably provide the hon. member with at least a feel for the kind of numbers that we'd be talking about. Currently there are 1.6 million people working here in the province of Alberta. Of course, due to the fiscal management of this government this is the highest number there ever has been in terms of gainful employment, and of that we're very, very proud. Of those Albertans that are working, it's our estimation, as near as we can be, that 98 percent of those are working at more than minimum wage, leaving 2 percent of that number at that level.

Minimum wage workers tend to be between the ages of 15 and 24, and most of them are working part-time. Mr. Speaker, I can say that here in Alberta and with the economic fiscal policy of this government we're setting the stage for minimum wage workers of course to move up within those organizations where they're currently employed. A strong economy, a low unemployment rate, and the kinds of training programs and family supports that we have help all working Albertans. It is important in Alberta to be working.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that most minimum wage earners are young people, as you mentioned, what are you doing to ensure that they have a promise of a better career in the future?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the best ways that we're working in this area is our Youth Connections program. I would invite any member here in the Legislature to visit one of our sites around the province, and you'll see there that when young people come in, we can really help get them career oriented. Certainly we have web sites providing information. We are normally recognized in Human Resources and Employment for the tremendous printed material that we can offer people for their education and information.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What supports does your department offer for low-income families who may be working for minimum wage?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, this government has provided the Alberta family employment tax credit, which puts cash into people's pockets. Through the national child benefit program we've provided for children's health services such as prescription drugs, optical, and diabetic supplies. We have housing programs. Here in Alberta it is important to get into the workplace, even if it's at the minimum wage. We do have support programs for them to get them in that transition of course from the minimum wage, but as they gain experience, they move up not only the experience ladder, but they move up the wage ladder as well.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

National Physiotherapy Month

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize National Physiotherapy Month, which runs from April 22 to May 21. National Physiotherapy Month provides an ideal opportunity for physiotherapists in Alberta to showcase their expertise and accomplishments and welcome community members to their facilities. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association has chosen to develop a campaign for National Physiotherapy Month called Spring into Action as a way to celebrate. The goal is to promote healthy gardening and help gardeners stay pain free this spring.

Physiotherapists have a detailed understanding of how the body works. They are university educated and trained to assess and improve movement and function and relieve pain. They promote good health by encouraging their patients to improve and increase their independence. Physiotherapy in Alberta plays an integral role in continued efforts to provide care and assistance, co-ordinate activities, and disseminate information to promote fitness, good health, and injury prevention.

I think it would be appropriate for all members to recognize the work that physiotherapists do in Alberta. You never know; you might need one one day.

Thank you very much.

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

Edmonton Heritage Fair

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday I had the pleasure of bringing greetings to the sixth Edmonton regional heritage fair, held in the Legislature pedway system. I also had a lot of fun participating as one of the judges. The heritage fair is based on a science fair model but asks students to create a project about Canadian heritage, history, culture, or geography. Students in grades 4 to 9 are involved, and it was really satisfying to see students making good use of our libraries, our museums, and our archives. I think that's thanks to great advice and assistance from their teachers. I was pleased to see these students using these resources for their projects rather than just the Internet, which is so tempting today.

The pedway system was filled. There were 229 projects displayed and prepared by 350 students and judged by 100 members of the community. The same fair was held in four other Alberta communities: Peace River, Lethbridge, Calgary, and Red Deer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Leaders of Tomorrow Volunteer Citizens of the Year

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year the St. Albert Community Information & Volunteer Centre organizes a tribute to be paid to the leaders of tomorrow and to the volunteer citizens of the year. On May 5 my colleague the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and I had the opportunity to congratulate these winners, and I would like to acknowledge them in the Assembly today.

Of the leaders of tomorrow, the elementary division award went

to Jeremy Goodall, the junior high division to Venessa Carlson, the senior high division to Jeff Beaton, and the postsecondary division to Matthew Heyworth.

The volunteer citizens of the year were chosen because it is the International Year of Volunteers. All three nominees were acknowledged: Dieter Knobloch, Bernie and Alfreda Melik, and Dr. Craig Roxburgh.

These are indeed extraordinary citizens of St. Albert. I would ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating these fine young leaders and citizens.

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

Edmonton Public School Board

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The editor of *The School Administrator*, an international magazine for school leaders, notes: we rarely turn over the majority of any one issue to spotlight a single school district, but we are making an exception this month. That exception is for the Edmonton public school board, whose Centre for Education is situated in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Edmonton public schools have embraced site-based decision-making and made it work. During the past five years Edmonton has essentially re-created itself as a system of choice for its 81,000 students. The district offers a highly imaginative array of about 30 programs from traditional back-to-basics to schools with strict dress codes to programs for hockey or artistic students or tailored to home schoolers or those with elements of the Christian faith and schools for those looking for international baccalaureate programs.

I join Editor Goldman and add my appreciation to Superintendent Dosdall, the Edmonton public school board, and the thousands of teachers and support staff for their service to children and for their expansive vision of public education.

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

Alberta Teachers

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize collectively the teachers of this province, the educators of our children. They are the women and men who have a profound impact on our children's lives and their future by providing them with a solid foundation, that being quality education. These hardworking and dedicated professionals give generously of their knowledge, their compassion, and their caring day after day. They help to inspire in children a love of learning and inculcate values of fair play, equality, and hard work, all of which will serve these children as they grow throughout their lives.

I know that all members of this House will join me in applauding and thanking all of our teachers for dedicating their lives to making a difference in the lives of the children of Alberta.

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

National Youth Bowling Championships

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the 2001 national youth bowling championships, organized by the Youth Bowling Council of Canada. The event took place last week in Calgary with the participation of teams from all our provinces and territories. They proudly represented the best of their zone, totaling over 300 selected youth bowlers. With them were hundreds of coaches and parents.

Thirty-six years ago the program named Youth Bowling Council was organized for youth bowlers. The national YBC each year enlists the aid of over 6,000 parents and adults to voluntarily coach, supervise, and instruct them. The fact that bowling teaches coordination and good fellowship and may be played alone, with a friend, by a family, or in competition with others makes it the number one participation sport in Canada. The fact that bowling is a sport that everyone can take part in makes bowling the number one social recreation in Canada.

I would like to congratulate the organizers, sponsors, youth bowlers, and parents for making it a successful national event in Calgary.

Portuguese Musical Society

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and recognize the 25th anniversary of the Portuguese Musical Society of Edmonton. A large celebration was held on Saturday, May 5, 2001, at Our Lady of Fatima church with the Edmonton and Calgary bands in attendance. The day began with a sod-turning ceremony on the site of the new home for the music society. The land has been purchased, and construction is slated to begin soon.

The Edmonton chapter president, Manuel Mota, and the secretary and conductor, Sandy Duarte, are overjoyed that the music society will soon have a permanent home. The marching band is composed of members of all ages, with youth always eager to learn to play a musical instrument and join the band.

Congratulations and best wishes, Portuguese Musical Society, in all your future endeavours. God bless.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I will now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 3.

[Motion carried]

2:40

Lloydminster Biprovincial Upgrader

Q3. Mr. Bonner moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

What are the yearly projections for upside interest accruing to the province from the operations of the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader for the period 1999-2014 as specified under the upside interest agreement of February 7, 1995, between the government and CIC (Crown Investments Corporation) Industrial Interests Inc.?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. On behalf of the Minister of Energy, who is not here today, Mr. Speaker, and in the spirit of open government I'm pleased to respond to this question. I would like just to make a couple of points first before they respond.

Alberta oil sands are presently attracting significant investment. Currently there's about \$53 billion spoken for, \$53 billion that could be invested by 2010, which is a significant investment. As the owner of the resource, Mr. Speaker, Alberta not only benefits from the royalties, but Alberta also sees and takes part of the risk.

Currently, bitumen prices are depressed, and when those prices are depressed, of course the royalties aren't at such a significant level. Now, the goal would be to have this resource upgraded in Alberta, of course, and that's certainly what we are working towards.

So given the variability and uncertainty attached to forecasts, especially longer term, the government does not forecast to 2014. We recommend, therefore, that this written question be rejected.

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

MR. BONNER: No further comments at this time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Written Question 3 lost]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I hereby move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 206
Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act**

[Debate adjourned May 15: Ms Blakeman speaking]

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

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to enter into this debate and speak against Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. The bill, that has been proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East, seeks to set down rules and regulations regarding conflict of interest for regional health authorities. This is an admirable idea, but I must speak against Bill 206 as I feel it would overly complicate our existing system.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994 17 regional health authorities were created to take over from 150 individual hospital and health unit boards. The regional health authorities were to ensure that the health issues of each region were dealt with in a timely and cost-effective manner. Since 1994 regional health authority members have been appointed by the Minister of Health and Wellness. Very soon there will be a system in place where two-thirds of members will be elected and the remaining one-third will be appointed by the minister.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The regional health authorities were given the responsibility of governing ethically from their inception. A regional health authority sets the direction for the health delivery system in the region, develops a business plan for the region, sets policies to guide programs and services, makes budget decisions, and consults with a wide range of community members.

Mr. Speaker, each regional health authority must develop conflict of interest bylaws and policies and have them approved by the Department of Health and Wellness. The Minister of Health and

Wellness is ultimately responsible for the actions of health authorities. The minister is governed by the Conflicts of Interest Act and expects a similar level of ethical conduct from the RHA boards.

The regional health authorities report to the minister, and he will work to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest through the selection criteria of regional health authority members as well as requiring adherence to codes of conduct and bylaws. The selection criteria for RHA appointments and the elections is outlined in the Local Authorities Election Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act.

Mr. Speaker, when members of the regional health authority are chosen to be part of the board, a number of items are considered to ensure that there will not be a conflict of interest. As a result, people with direct or indirect connections to the health system are judged to be ineligible. If you are a nurse employed by the region or a doctor or a physiotherapist working in the region, you are not eligible to be a member of the regional health authority. People who are directly or indirectly involved in certain contacts with the regional health authority are also not eligible to serve as members. It is also the minister's prerogative to dismiss any and all members of the authority if the authority is not properly exercising its powers or carrying out its duties under the Regional Health Authorities Act or if for some other reason the minister considers it in the public interest to dismiss the members.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness is responsible to the voters, and soon so will be the majority of regional health authority board members, making all board members more accountable. Additional to the open forums, elected board members of each regional health authority under the guidance of our elected minister of health develop a code of ethics. The code of ethics is an extensive list of standards that must be followed. It also covers areas of conflicts of interest that may not be covered by the bylaws of the Regional Health Authorities Act. Each regional health authority develops its own bylaws and policies and codes of ethics because the regions have different needs and concerns. The bylaws are similar but unique and enable the boards to deal with regional issues in a timely and effective manner.

Mr. Speaker, I will give an example of a region that has an extensive code of ethics and has complete conflicts of interest guidelines. The Chinook regional health authority has a very extensive bylaw dealing with conflicts of interest which includes defining conflicts of interest, measures for disclosure, and mechanisms for resolution of all such conflicts in a public forum. Under the current RHA members' report they report to the minister in matters of conflicts of interest. Under Bill 206 they would report to the Ethics Commissioner.

The office of the Ethics Commissioner, Mr. Speaker, is exclusive to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and to senior government officials. To include regional health authority board members as an additional responsibility would reduce the availability of the office to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and senior government officials. The Ethics Commissioner would surely become less effective overall if he had to deal with all the regional health authority board members in addition to his current responsibilities. The resource that the office of the Ethics Commissioner provides to government is of extreme importance, and we must protect his ability to function effectively to protect the interests of Albertans as they pertain to Members of the Legislative Assembly and senior government officials.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 removes autonomy from the regional health authorities, which currently resolve their own conflicts of interest situations. These issues are resolved in a public forum, open and accessible to every region and every community. The background

of each member of the RHA board is scrutinized before their appointment, and when there is even a slight potential for a conflict, bylaws and codes of ethics prevail in eliminating bias in the decision-making process of the RHA.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, all decisions made by the RHA come to the minister in the form of a business plan or a health proposal, which is also heavily scrutinized. Contracts, labour agreements, and issues of supply and waste disposal are all decided in a cost-benefit analysis, and any individual that may benefit from these agreements is excluded from the decision-making process.

Mr. Speaker, as I have outlined, the system of preventing conflicts of interest has multiple monitoring systems, and every decision is closely scrutinized to prevent any individual from exploiting the health care system to their own advantage or benefit. Our RHA boards have spent years developing codes of conduct, ethics, and bylaws which acknowledge the importance of having a system that is immune to corruption. It is unnecessary to extend the office of the Ethics Commissioner to watch over RHAs as they are comprised of members who are very capable of monitoring their own membership. Also, if this system does fail, the supervision of the minister of health will prevail in ensuring that RHAs operate in the public interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to a bill that was put forward by the hon. Member from Lethbridge-East, and it is Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. Certainly it is one of those acts that we do need, and we need it very desperately in this province, particularly when we look at all the reasons for having such legislation. Without a doubt, when we look at Bill 206 and the type of legislation it will provide to Albertans, it is dealing with one of the more sensitive departments that we have in government. It is dealing with, beyond a doubt, one of the most expensive departments we have in government, and it is dealing with some of the most sensitive material, that Albertans cherish and wish to be private. So when the hon. member proposed this bill, he certainly did it by providing the absolute best legislation that we can provide to Albertans. [interjections]

Now, we hear some oohs and aahs from members on the opposite side. Mr. Speaker, they tried to tell us that this is too much legislation, yet we have on the floor of this Assembly a bill called Bill 1. It is the flagship bill of the Premier for this First Session of the 25th Legislature. Now, this bill is also a bill that duplicates other bills that are currently in place. This is a bill that was not in place when billions of dollars of rebates were given out earlier this year, yet there seems to be a need for this type of legislation. Here we have Bill 206, which is there to protect Albertans, there to protect Albertans with their most sensitive information, and we have people from the opposite side saying that this is not required. Why the double standard? So, yes, I will speak to this, and I will say that there's every bit a need for this bill as they perceive that there is for Bill 1.

Now, currently in Alberta there are 17 regional health authorities, and they write and implement their own conflicts of interest bylaws applicable to all staff of that regional health authority. When we are designing any public policy, there are some critical questions that must be asked, and certainly what we have to do when we examine public policy is assume first of all that there are various positions in the policy that are correct. So we assume when we see conflict of

interest laws being written by each particular regional health authority that each of the regional health authorities will have legislation that will be the very best, that will be consistent so that people, no matter where they are in this province, as residents of Alberta can be certain that the utmost and best legislation is there and that there is consistency.

We certainly have that when we look at the Canada Health Act and we look at the five principles that apply to all Canadians. So in the delivery of those services by the regional health authorities, why should we not expect conflict of interest legislation to be consistent, to be the same for each of the 17 regional health authorities?

Now, then, another reason why we do need this legislation is that – all of us in this Assembly agree – the traditional form of delivering health care in this province has changed drastically and has changed drastically over the last decade. So we do have in the province now an increasing dependence on private, for-profit health care. We do have people that are sitting on regional health authority boards that are also owners of private, for-profit facilities. So do we not need stringent legislation in order to protect Albertans? We would assume that that legislation would be in place. We would assume that people cannot, in the same position, wear a hat when they're dealing with public health care and put on a different hat for private, for-profit health care. We have seen any number of these conflicts arise in this province, particularly when we look at the Calgary regional health authority.

So what will this piece of legislation, Bill 206, do to firm up the conflicts of interest? How, by not having it, does a public health care system get undermined? Now, then, Bill 206 will certainly restore public confidence in the public health care system and also with our regional health authority boards. There always is in any elected or appointed position a perception, whether it's real or imagined, that people in that position do have an opportunity to gain. It is often said to every member of this Assembly when they are out on the street about our pensions that we supposedly are perceived to have and the great influence that we can certainly deliver as members of this Assembly. So here, then, we certainly have to have some type of legislation which is consistent and which is beyond reproach when dealing with perceived or real conflicts of interest.

As well, when we look at Bill 206, does what happens correspond with accepted practices in the private sector or in parts of the public sector? Again, as I mentioned earlier when I was discussing the Calgary regional health authority, we do have numerous instances where we have people sitting on both sides of the fence, and it does undermine public confidence in our health care system. I would think, as well, when we look at health care, whether it be private or public, that it is the most important service that government provides in this province and in this country. It is certainly one of those services provided that is the envy of every other country in the world, and it is worth our taking every possible step to protect it and to certainly make certain that we do not have conflicts of interest.

Albertans want to know beyond a doubt that conflicting interests play no part in their health care delivery today, and they also want this assurance that it will not in the future. As well, when we look at Bill 206, one of the great advantages is that it will put in uniform legislation applicable to all regional health authorities, and it will increase our ability to monitor and to deal with conflicts, potential or otherwise.

3:00

Now, then, Bill 206 is the first bill being brought forward by the Official Opposition. This legislation would apply comprehensive and uniform conflict of interest rules to all regional health authority board members and employees as well as to all contractors and

independent health service providers that have a contractual relationship with the regional health authority.

This legislation is modeled after the Alberta public service code of conduct and ethics. Bill 206 applies disclosure and conflict of interest principles similar to those applied in industry and government, and if those standards are good enough for industry and government, then certainly they should be good enough for the regional health authorities.

Now, certainly a positive step this year – it's going to occur in this fall's municipal elections – is that we are also going to be voting on two-thirds of the regional health authorities' boards of directors. It is certainly a step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, but again this new change doesn't go far enough. We have 83 members in this Assembly that are voted on by the public at large to handle a budget that I believe is in the neighbourhood of \$21 billion. We have been given that responsibility. Now we are asking people in this province to have one-third of a regional health authority appointed.

The people of Alberta trust us with the responsibility of over \$20 billion, yet we take one of the larger departments of that and we do not have that entire board elected. Certainly I think this would be a step in the right direction. If people knew that their position on that board was due to them being elected by the public, then certainly this would be another incentive for people, and we would not require as stringent rules for conflicts of interest. But we do require these rules. As long as there are appointments, there are no guarantees that people would be dismissed from these boards for conflicts of interest.

Now, then, this piece of legislation, Bill 206, has legislative importance in three dimensions. First, Bill 206 addresses current and future conflicts of interest outlined by providing a conflict of interest definition and a mechanism by which conflicts of interest can be investigated. The bill also requires that recurring or ongoing conflicts must result in either the termination of the relationship with the regional health authority or the divestiture of the asset causing the conflict. Again, this would certainly address some of the concerns that we have heard regarding the Calgary regional health authority, where we do have people sitting on the board that have interests both on the public side and on the private, for-profit side of health care delivery in the Calgary region.

Secondly, Bill 206 applies a uniform standard of legislative conflict of interest rules to all regional health authorities. Current conflict of interest rules governing regional health authorities are neither uniform nor legislated; that is, no one said that conflict of interest rules apply to all regional health authorities. Each regional health authority will be developing its own conflict rules, and the conflict rules are mere bylaws, not statutory legislation.

Finally, Bill 206 is designed to restore public confidence in Alberta's health care system. Conflicts between private and public interests, whether perceived or real, are damaging to the public's estimation of and confidence in public officials. This is particularly true when the conflict deals with a service as personal as health.

Now, then, Mr. Speaker, this is good legislation. It is legislation that is required. It is legislation that Albertans want. Regional health authorities have a public duty to uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence in the health care system is preserved. It is the responsibility of regional health authorities to safeguard public finances and to ensure that personnel they engage do not have private interests that can benefit either directly or indirectly from the regional health authority's activities.

It is also the responsibility of the regional health authorities to adopt, apply, and enforce conflict of interest rules that are at least as rigorous as those applying to us as MLAs and to government employees and contractors engaged in public service under the

Public Service Act. Albertans have a right, Mr. Speaker, to regional health authority services provided with impartiality and integrity.

Now, then, this bill, Mr. Speaker, covers situations that should be covered by public record. What the information makes apparent is that there is good reason for Albertans to be concerned that regional health authorities have permitted personnel it engages in its own business to be involved in actions which give rise to real, potential, or apparent conflicts of interest. There is widespread public concern that commonly accepted standards for the conduct of public business in relation to conflicts of interest have not been adopted – and the example I've been using is the Calgary regional health authority – in a timely fashion or that these sets of rules and guidelines have not been enforced. These certainly do warrant an investigation by the Ethics Commissioner.

As well, Mr. Speaker, in my closing remarks here I would certainly want to say that Bill 206 is a very, very important piece of legislation. It is one that I would urge all members of this Assembly to support. It will put in place rules and regulations that are equally as stringent as what we as members of this Assembly uphold and follow.

With those comments, I would like to take my seat and cede the floor to other members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to enter the debate on Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. I really share and value the principle of protecting the Alberta public against conflicts of interest. However, it is without any reservation that I rise to speak against Bill 206, as proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East.

3:10

It is my position that Bill 206 is redundant because all of the concerns it raises have already been addressed by the new regional health authority election and appointment regulations. Bill 206 in effect is questioning a new system of regional health authority elections and appointments as outlined under the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001. Essentially it alleges that our system is open to all sorts of conflict of interest situations, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, this is just not the case.

Let me start out by saying that the debate that occurs in this Assembly is essentially so members across the way can help us to see where we must improve to better serve Alberta if the points raised are worth while. However, I intend to show today, Mr. Speaker, that the basic assumptions underscoring Bill 206 are flawed, and therefore the bill itself should not pass.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

Without doubt, the sponsor has the best interests of Albertans at heart. Health care is vital to Albertans, and as such it is the responsibility of everyone in this Assembly to find innovative ways, effective ways to deliver the best health care possible to Albertans. This is a task that all of us should take very seriously, and this is exactly why the regional health authorities were created and why we are moving to a system of elections that decide two-thirds of each board. This new system will provide Albertans with the most efficient and best possible health care governance. Further, Mr. Speaker, the makeup of the boards will ensure that all Albertans will be represented fairly.

However, according to Bill 206 our regional health authority system is susceptible to a number of conflict of interest situations. Bill 206 states that all potential candidates must disclose any conflict

of interest they may have with regard to their private interests and the ways they may further those private interests as members of the RHA board. Well, truth be told, I'm speaking here today to assure the sponsor that this government already has a system in place to ensure that all of those who are appointed or elected to a regional health authority do have the public interest at heart and not their own pocketbooks.

Mr. Speaker, if we take a look at the rules established for the regional health authority elections and appointments, we see firm regulations that ensure that no conflicts of interest or improprieties take place. Just as a reminder here is a list of some of the ineligible persons for election or appointment to a regional health authority board: first, regional health authority employees, Health and Wellness employees, independent health service providers that get funding from either a regional health authority or the government, the directors, officers, and employees of health service organizations receiving 50 percent or more of their funding from Health and Wellness, a regional health authority, or both. As well, spouses of any of the above-mentioned groups are ineligible for election. Any elected government official in Canada or any person nominated to hold office is ineligible, and judges are also ineligible.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the government has mandated that if any of these ineligible candidates do run or stand for an appointment to a regional health authority, they remove themselves from any conflict of interest within 30 days of their election or appointment. As well, the employees of a regional health authority or the Health and Wellness department are required to take a leave of absence to run for a regional health authority position.

It seems to me that what Bill 206 is asking is that all persons who run or stand for a position on a regional health authority must disclose any conflict of interest, and if a conflict of interest is declared, they must take appropriate measures to remove themselves from it. Mr. Speaker, I would ask: isn't this already stipulated by the regulations concerning the election and appointment to regional health authorities? After all, we don't have conflict of interest regulations and an ineligibility list just for show. We have them to make sure that the people on the regional health authorities are people who speak for the best interests of Albertans.

Our regional health authority boards will be made up of reliable, impartial community stakeholders, people representing all of the citizens of Alberta's communities, people making sure that the health care in this province will be as good as it can be both now and in the future, not people out to make a buck or two from the health care system. The list of eligible and ineligible persons makes sure that the process is open, accountable, and, above all, clean.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

This government has made it clear that any conflict of interest is unacceptable, and those rules will be enforced. I therefore wonder why we would need Bill 206. It doesn't propose to do anything that this government hasn't already endeavoured to do. We could wrap the regional health authorities up in red tape many times over if we liked, but why bother, Mr. Speaker, when the system works as it stands? Alberta is poised to lead this country into the future as a first-rate example of the best way to operate and to govern the great health care system for Albertans.

With the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act we are giving Albertans the regional health authority boards they have asked for, and we have made sure these boards will be composed of impartial and accountable Albertans who are governed by strict conflict of interest regulations. We've covered these bases.

In closing, I repeat that I cannot support Bill 206. I leave this

forum for my colleagues to join me in the debate, and I thank you, thank you, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from all the members, and that's the spirit of the Legislature.

I'll start with some general comments on Bill 206. The integrity of Alberta's public service is of profound importance to the people of this province. Alberta and indeed Canada have over a very long period developed a tradition in their public service that is in many ways the envy of the world for its impartiality. I use the term "public servants" in the broadest sense of the term to include elected, appointed, employed, and contracted officials of the public service. Citizens in Canada are confident that they can approach public servants knowing that their interest as a citizen should and normally will come first. This is a matter of ethical duty, and it cuts to the heart of democracy.

Many of my thoughts today have been stimulated by a book entitled *Honest Politics*, which I think should be standard reading for every MLA. What are the fundamental principles of public service ethics? Well, there are several, including impartiality, fiduciary trust, accountability, and responsibility.

Impartiality can be understood as a lack of bias in public decision-making. Public officials have a duty to be impartial as they exercise their duties, and if they are in positions that seriously reduce that impartiality, they may no longer be able to appropriately fulfill their duties.

Fiduciary trust rests on the shoulders of public officials because they are acting on behalf of the public. They are trustees of the public interest. This means that public officials have a responsibility to protect and promote the public's best interest. The public interest without exception must always prevail over private interest.

Accountability means that public officials must be able to demonstrate in a credible manner that the expectations of public officials are being met.

Mr. Speaker, because human beings are what they are, we cannot always rely on good intentions and unwritten conventions to ensure that our public servants behave ethically, so society has encoded these expectations in regulations and in laws, as we are discussing today. In Alberta there's the Conflicts of Interest Act, which applies to us as MLAs here today. There is the Public Service Act, which applies to public servants, and under this act there is a code, a well-delineated, well-written, and well-thought-out code of conduct and ethics. At the moment neither of these acts apply to regional health authorities, although RHAs receive billions of taxpayer dollars and are creatures of the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, it's the intention of Bill 206 to ensure that Alberta's regional health authorities are held to the highest standards of ethics, standards which we believe all Albertans would support. There exist in Alberta a number of situations which raise the gravest concerns about conflicts of interest in Alberta's regional health authorities. For example, there are a number of senior officials in the Calgary regional health authority who are or who have been in untenable positions for being on the public payroll. These situations have been brought to the attention of the CRHA board but have been allowed to continue. My comments today are not directed at individuals. They are directed at a system, a system in which the RHAs should require that apparent, potential, and real conflicts of interests are discontinued. Instead, the system today allows apparent, potential, and real conflicts of interest to continue without resolution.

I will provide one example that has been the subject of some question periods. The chief medical officer of the Calgary regional authority, who is paid in the range of a quarter million dollars a year to oversee the delivery of medical services in the region, has immediate family members who are major shareholders in a surgical company that contracts to the Calgary regional health authority. In other words, this individual is ultimately responsible for a contract that channels large sums of public money to his immediate family members.

There are a number of other such cases in the Calgary regional health authority involving eye surgery and other areas of medicine. Material I have tabled in this Assembly provides details, including the names and positions of individuals and the names of various companies, including numbered companies, whose cases raise serious questions about conflicts of interest.

Bill 206 would bring the regional health authorities into line with conflict of interest legislation and codes that are common in other aspects of public life. At present each RHA is allowed to develop its own conflict of interest guidelines. This is simply not working. The codes that have been developed, such as the ones at the Calgary regional health authority, do little that is effective. They merely ask the person who is in conflict to declare their conflict and remove themselves from immediate decisions. This over the long term becomes meaningless action, a kind of charade of propriety. In fact, it appears that people who may be in conflicts of interest might have even participated in developing the CRHA's conflict of interest policy. Little wonder that nothing much has been done.

Conflicts of interest that have gone on for years are allowed to continue, to expand, and indeed to work their way into the culture of the organization. An organizational culture of conflict becomes ingrained so that standards of public-sector conduct that are normal in other institutions, including, as far as I know, every other aspect of the Alberta government, may no longer apply in these situations. In fact, Mr. Speaker, not only are these expectations required in almost every area of the Alberta government; a great number of private corporations have the same standards. A great number of private corporations would not tolerate and do not tolerate the kinds of apparent and real conflicts of interest that we are seeing in some RHAs. I've made various inquiries of major businesses and have found that generally they are quite ruthless in ending conflicts of interest among staff.

The other day I was able to obtain TransAlta's policy on conflict of interest, and it was unequivocal. TransAlta simply states point-blank that perceived, potential, or real conflicts of interest are to be avoided. There is no room for people being in prolonged situations where there are questions of whose interests they may be serving.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 would ensure that all Albertans will benefit from the same high standards of ethical behaviour from their RHAs, when it comes to conflicts of interest, that are expected in the corporate sector and the rest of the public sector. Among Bill 206's most important provisions is section 8(2). Under section 8(2) there are requirements that ongoing conflicts of interest must be ended. It simply isn't enough for a person to excuse himself from a decision. If the conflict is ongoing, it must be terminated. The way the bill proposes ending the conflict is by requiring the person in question to either dispose of their private interest that places him or her in conflict or to end his position on the public payroll.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, many of the concerns that Bill 206 is intended to address arise around chiefs of medical departments. Chiefs of medical departments sit undoubtedly in a difficult position, a position in which conflict of interest easily raises itself and must be dealt with.

Chiefs of medical departments in regional health authorities are under contract to the regional health authority and as such are servants of the public interest. They are frequently paid, by most people's standards, very well. The chief of a medical department in a sizable RHA may well be paid \$100,000 a year for the part-time position. A chief medical officer for an entire RHA may be paid a quarter of a million dollars a year of taxpayers' money to look after the public interest. These are not just token public appointments. These are serious, contractual, well-paid public appointments under which people occupying them must first serve, without exception, the public interest.

It's also worth pointing out, Mr. Speaker, a particular point that was made in this Assembly the other day which I believe to be erroneous, to be a misinterpretation of the facts. The fact of the matter is that the controls on MLAs and the legislation that covers MLAs' conflicts of interest do not apply to regional health authorities. The same standard, the same legislation that applies to us does not extend to regional health authorities. I wish that it would, and if it were the case that it did, Bill 206 would in fact be unnecessary.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at considerable length here. [some applause] And I guess the other members would like me to. But I think that for now I will rest. I look forward to the opportunity to debate this bill at greater length in committee.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to stand and debate Bill 206, presented by the Member for Lethbridge-East, Bill 206 being the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act.

As I've been listening to the debate itself, we do have 17 regional health authorities that already have in place their own conflict of interest bylaws or regulations that fit well in their own jurisdictions. I heard the member opposite saying that he has reviewed TransAlta's standards that they have for conflicts of interest. I would like to know whether possibly EPCOR or anybody else has the same ones which are being proposed under Bill 206. I think, again, each corporation in this case has their own set that fits them well.

When we look at conflict of interest, again we have to look at every regional health authority having written up their own set of regulations. Also, the Minister of Health and Wellness continues to take the ultimate responsibility for whatever actions are taken by the authorities. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that we need Bill 206, because it would duplicate what's already in place.

Also, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this fall, we're going to have election of two-thirds of board members. That is why the government has tabled Bill 7 in this session. With Bill 7 this government has considered the new challenges that will be posed by the elected health authorities and has extended and tightened up conflict of interest regulations in this area for potential flaws at the time.

Mr. Speaker, going back to Bill 206, although the intentions are noble – I believe there's some good stuff in here, but it's already in place right now. So, again, I'd say that it's redundant; it's being duplicated. I think we have some very good people that hopefully will be running in the election, and there are going to be people that are going to be cognizant of their responsibilities as members on a regional health authority, and there are conflicts of interest rules that they have to abide by.

I think that when we look at this, Mr. Speaker, mention was made that we have to have the RHAs held to the highest of standards. I believe the 17 RHAs that are out there are already held to a high standard. I believe they're working toward the good, the betterment

of our health system for the residents of Alberta. As I indicated earlier, we do already have conflict of interest guidelines that have been put in place by regional health authorities.

I'm not going to dwell much further on this, Mr. Speaker, but I believe Bill 206, as indicated, is a noble gesture by the member opposite for Lethbridge-East, but again I would urge my colleagues and everybody in this House to not vote for Bill 206. I believe we have good mechanisms in place. I can reiterate, go over what I've said again, but I don't think we can do that. Again, the disclosure of conflicts of interest is already there. I think that whoever is going to be on the regional health authorities, whether elected or appointed, has to recognize that any potential conflict of interest by their family members has to be recognized, and I think they already know that.

Again, as we know here in the House, we ourselves are bound by conflict of interest bylaws, or at least I do personally on my own. I certainly would not want to be in a conflict that would affect this government or Albertans here in this province. I think everybody has a conscience of their own. I think the good people that are running in the election and the one-third that will be appointed will all be aware that they have a conflict of interest regulation to look at.

We have an Ethics Commissioner that we have to also speak to, and of course he's going to say that you have to disclose what your interests may or may not be. If you have interests that would be affecting you because of a regional health authority appointment or election, you should disclose them or discharge them, if that's the case, so that you can run.

I think we do have some pretty good laws in place right now. So to have Bill 206 accepted would not be the right thing to do. Although, as I indicated, there are some pretty good things in here, they are already being done, Mr. Speaker.

With that I sit down and allow some other member of the House to address Bill 206, and urge all my colleagues and members of this House to reject Bill 206. Thank you.

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

3:40

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak in support of Bill 206 and to respond, if I might, to some of the comments that have been made by members opposite during the debate that we have been undergoing.

I think it's important to start with what is actually in the bill, and, Mr. Speaker, the definition of conflict of interest appears on page 1. . . . means a conflict between the public and private interests of a board member, independent health service provider, employee or contractor that occurs when they use their position to gain personal benefits or benefits for their relatives that are not available to the general public.

So we aren't talking exclusively about health board members. The act is intended to apply to a wide range of individuals that are employed by or associated with regional health authorities.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs made some rather interesting arguments. I found the one argument, if I am interpreting him correctly, that somehow the minister of health was going to look after things to be spurious, I guess is what I would call the argument. It seems to me that it's asking a great deal that the minister of health be held responsible for the ethical behaviour of the hundreds of people that are involved in the regional health authorities and that would come under the aegis of this act. I found it an interesting but, I think, irrelevant argument that somehow or other that minister could hold that responsibility.

The notion that each region has a code of ethics has been men-

tioned by a number of members opposite, and it's interesting. I think the point was made before that those codes have actually been made up by some of those regional health authorities that they apply to. It's a little like the fox guarding the henhouse to expect that the standard that Albertans would expect is going to be reflected in each and every one of those codes of ethics. It seems the rationale for not having one code of ethics that applies to all of the authorities, just as the code of ethics here applies to all of us – it's hard to understand why someone would argue against that position.

There was another comment I think made that the Ethics Commissioner couldn't handle the job, and I found that an interesting sort of argument given that it was this government that added to the Ethics Commissioner the work of the privacy officer and freedom of information. So it's, again, an argument that was made but I don't think carries much validity when you look at what's happened and when you look at the ethics officer for the federal government and the number of employees that officer is responsible for. The argument that the job is just too big for one Ethics Commissioner I don't think holds much water.

The notion that this bill would take away the autonomy of health boards is really an interesting one. Just how autonomous are they when a third of the members are appointed by the provincial government? It's hardly an autonomous board if those appointments are made from outside. So the argument of autonomy, again, is one that I think is rather weak.

The notion that RHAs have spent years developing codes of ethics: unfortunately, when it comes to codes of ethics, time in doesn't mean quality out. They may have spent a great deal of time developing codes, but I don't think that that assures us they are of the rigour and comprehensiveness that the application of Bill 206 would be.

The comments from a couple of the members that the system works well seem to be – and I find it quite incredible coming from a member from Calgary: the notion that the system works well. When you look at the Calgary regional health authority and the conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker, three of the private, for-profit surgical facilities that have current contracts with the Calgary regional health authority are owned or partly owned by senior medical officers of the Calgary regional health authority.

You know, the largest contract for the provision of surgical services was awarded to a private, for-profit clinic owned by a Calgary regional health authority medical officer and his business partners. Two of the five private, for-profit surgical clinics that provide virtually all the eye surgery in Calgary are owned or partly owned by CRHA medical officers. The list goes on. The private, for-profit eye surgery clinics in Calgary appear to co-operate with one another in regards to the facility fees they charged to the CRHA rather than compete with one another. Two of the private, for-profit surgical facilities that have contracts with the CRHA are located in former public hospitals once owned or operated by CRHA.

So to claim that the system works well is to stretch matters, Mr. Speaker, and I think that the members opposite have not really taken seriously the provisions of Bill 206, because I think it is a well-crafted bill that would serve the province well, and I would urge its passage.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The leader of the ND Party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. It's generally accepted in modern democratic societies that people elected or appointed to serve the public in government or govern-

ment agencies must put their duty to the public above their private interests. They cannot and are not expected to use the knowledge, experience, and contacts gained while working in the public sector to financially benefit themselves or close family and associates in a way that would not be available to ordinary citizens. We expect public officials, whether they are permanent or contracted public servants, elected representatives – Members of Parliament, Senators, MLAs – to serve the public interest. Where there is a conflict between the public interest and the private or the perceived problem of this kind of conflict between private, family, or party interests, the public interest should always prevail.

3:50

So, I guess, when we debate this bill, these are in a sense some of the principles that we should pay attention to. Since it's dealing with a situation that's been created by the actions and the statutes of this government over the last several years – the latest of those actions being Bill 11 – I think the bill is a timely step to address the potential for conflicts of interest to arise in our health care system, given the organization and the functioning of our regional health authorities.

I have been listening to at least a part of the debate, and it's been argued that given the unique conditions under which each RHA has to function and deliver the services required by residents of the region covered, we have to make to special order the conflict of interest rules as well. I have difficulty figuring that out. The minister has the responsibility to make sure that there are certain uniform standards that prevail across the province, so much so that he has retained within the law the power to dismiss any regional health authority that in his or her judgment doesn't measure up to a sort of uniform observance of and compliance with these expectations which he or she holds the government has.

So there is, on the one hand, an expectation and a clearer statement of it in the statutes of the province that the minister is responsible for seeking and establishing and making sure that such province-wide standards are observed. Yet, on the other hand, this same minister turns around and sees no reason to expect some uniformity, some standardization of the conflict of interest requirements across the province, across the boundaries of the 17 regional health authorities. Just because there are 17 regional health authorities in itself is no argument to have 17 different sets of conflicts of interest regulations. It makes absolutely no sense.

Logically, it has certainly no purchase anywhere. You know, if you think through it, it makes no sense, whether it's the regional health authority in Calgary or the Capital regional health authority or whether it's some other regional health authority that's contracting out services, which in fact is at the root of the problem. The potential that has been created for conflicts of interests is, of course, the very decision that this government made and put in law: that regional health authorities will be encouraged to and legally certainly authorized to contract out services. That creates the potential for conflict of interest insofar as the very people who work for the regional health authority make decisions and have inside knowledge of what decisions are to be made, how they're made, what is the overall set of considerations that lead to the making of a decision. This is the kind of inside information that's not available to those providers on the outside who don't have either the shareholders or members working inside the authority. So that creates the potential for conflict and the real instances of conflict.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods cited already the results of a carefully done study in the Calgary regional health authority by a former journalist who worked for the *Calgary Herald*, Gillian Steward. Gillian Steward, in her study which is called Public

Bodies, Private Parts: Surgical Contracts and Conflicts of Interest at the Calgary Regional Health Authority, demonstrates clearly and concludes the instances of conflicts of interest that arise and remain in place in the Calgary regional health authority.

Now, what this bill tries to do is put in law some arrangements which will ensure that across the province every regional health authority will comply with certain rules when it comes to ensuring that the potential that's been created by the very acts and policies of this government for conflict of interest to arise doesn't become a reality. And if it does become a reality, then there are ways in which to deal with it.

So, as you may have already inferred from what I'm saying, I'm speaking in favour of the bill. I am certainly hoping that the members on the government side will allow this bill to proceed to the next stage. If they have specific objections to certain clauses or sections of the act, then surely they will have their chance to bring forward amendments to improve the act, as I think this Assembly is entitled to do with any act that comes before it. We can certainly try to make changes in it, and in the end if the amendments that may be proposed don't get voted in, then surely we have a chance to vote a bill down. But to vote a bill down at the second reading would seem to be not a good thing for a Legislature to do.

I think it's a bill that addresses serious problems, serious concerns that Albertans have, serious issues that pertain to whether the present arrangements that are in place to deal with conflict of interest work properly or not. I think it's a bill that needs serious consideration, needs fuller debate in the House.

In the end, certainly, the will of the majority will prevail. So I will ask the House as a whole, on all sides of the Legislature, to vote for this bill at second reading so that it will see a clause-by-clause study and debate in the House. At the end of that process, using our wisdom, individual and collective, we'll say yes or no to it.

It looks like my time has run out.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. leader of the ND Party, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close debate on second reading of Bill 206.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to stand and close debate on Bill 206. This is a bill that looks at one of the issues that comes up in the discussion about how we portray to Albertans our commitment to open and accountable processes as we deliver services that the public has asked us as their government to implement. We look at it from the perspective of how do we make sure that individuals out there across Alberta reflect on our deeds and our actions and say: they're thinking about our best interests, the best interests of Albertans. We want to make sure that we end up conveying to them the kind of message that effectively we are trying to instill in them a confidence that our delivery systems are serving their needs.

Bill 206 looks at the issue of the conflicts of interest legislation under which the public service operates and basically takes that same set of standards and that same measuring stick and applies it to the health authorities that we've created around the province to effectively replace what would have been the public service under a previous structure of government. Essentially, then, what we should be doing is extending to that new level of government because it's part of our delivering of that service – we're basically going to extend to that entity or that agency the same expectation that we would have had they still been under the umbrella of the public service in delivering services for Albertans.

4:00

We have to look at it from the perspective of the fact that within the Regional Health Authorities Act, yes, there are clauses and requirements that each health authority have its own defined conflict of interest guidelines, but what we've got here is effectively the creation of a patchwork. I know they consult with each other, they look at each other, but in the end each regional health authority has a different set of conflict of interest guidelines that they operate under. What we have, then, is a situation where Albertans in one part of the province judge what's going on in their area, but when they hear about something that goes on in a different area, they don't see a consistency. Mr. Speaker, we have to start looking at that and making sure that that kind of perception of all Albertans is based on a common set of guidelines. We should look at that in the context of: how do we deal with it?

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake mentioned that we also have overarching here, conflict of interest guidelines that are set up by the relevant participating professional organizations, but that basically deals with the individual and the patient or the recipient of the health service, not the relationship between the decision-making and the openness of that decision-making. So to say that we've got that in place and we don't need Bill 206 doesn't work very well.

As we come to the conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I guess I want to use the same analogy that we heard from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar when he talked about the sheep that were wandering and we had to have a shepherd for each flock. Well, I would suggest that under modern agriculture, where consistency of product and the need to have a homogeneous type of product and a consistent definition of product – what we would be doing if we were agricultural operators now is bringing each of those flocks in under a common set of nutrition requirements, a common set of management requirements. So we would in effect be bringing the flocks together under a common shepherd, and that's what we're doing with Bill 206. We're bringing all of the regional health authorities under the Ethics Commissioner, where we can have the consistency the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar asked for when he was talking about having these little flocks looked after in a common way, reflecting the kind of new approach that we would be dealing with in tending those sheep that the member was talking about.

We also need to look at the efficiencies that can be created by dealing with it that way.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the motion for second reading of Bill 206, Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Massey	Pannu
Mason	Nicol	Taft

Against the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Ouellette
Ady	Jacobs	Rathgeber
Amery	Jonson	Renner
Broda	Lord	Snelgrove

Cao	Lougheed	Stelmach
Cardinal	Lukaszuk	Stevens
Cenaiko	Lund	Strang
Danyluk	Marz	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Masyk	Taylor
Friedel	McClellan	VanderBurg
Goudreau	McClelland	Vandermeer
Haley	McFarland	Woloshyn
Herard	Oberg	Zwozdesky
Horner	O'Neill	
Totals:	For – 6	Against – 41

[Motion lost]

Bill 207

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 207 with the large number of members assembled here this afternoon. It was very nice of them to attend and hear the speeches this afternoon.

This Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, is an act that seeks to help offset the high prices of tools for tradespeople and journeymen. This bill came about after my discussions with many people. I can't remember the first time I ever would have heard about a mechanic, for example, not being able to deduct the cost of his tools as an employee. The first conversation where I would have heard of this would have been a long, long time ago, I'm sure, but as recently as during the election campaign when going around and speaking with people, many times apprentices or journeymen would make the comment that they thought it was unfair that they were unable to deduct from income tax the cost of their tools.

A couple of days ago I was speaking with a recent university graduate, just a recent graduate, and he had worked for several years in his own little construction company. He was asking me what kinds of things I was involved in currently. I said: well, one of the things that's keeping me busy right now is just kind of getting ready for this private member's bill. He said: well, what's the bill? I explained that we sought to bring forward a bill that would enable journeymen and apprentices to deduct the cost of their tools from income tax. He looked at me – and this is an educated person, just received his bachelor's degree – and said: "Well, I've been doing that all along. Was that illegal?"

The difference, Mr. Speaker, is pretty simple. He was self-employed. He wasn't a journeyman. He, in fact, had started his business out of high school and had learned the business with his father and was a good businessperson, but he decided to go to university and get a degree to become a teacher. But he had been deducting the cost of his tools all along, and he looked at me really quite surprised that tradespersons working for some employer were unable to do just that. So he's one of many people out there that just would assume that this is a normal course of affairs, except for those tradespeople that are caught in that position of being purchasers of very expensive tools and yet unable to deduct the cost of those tools from their income tax. It wasn't my initiative particularly. It was a great many people out there making me aware of those concerns and that they would like to see that corrected and addressed somehow.

4:20

I noted with interest, when I started doing some research on this bill and when some people started helping me with it, that federally the same initiative has been introduced. In fact, just before the recent federal election there was a federal bill called C-205 which sought to do almost exactly the same as this particular bill that we are discussing today, Bill 207. It sought to do exactly the same kind of thing at the federal level. The people who were involved in it indicated in some articles that were written that there was a great deal of hope that this would come through federally as well, but there's no guarantee of that. In spite of the fact that the bill was put forward and likely would die on the Order Paper with the federal election, the comment made by the people involved was: we should keep pushing for it as tradespeople. We should keep pushing for it as legislators that can address this issue on behalf of those people paying these high costs of tools. If we are able to implement that, as we are capable of doing here in Alberta, perhaps then that would provide some initiative as well for the federal scene to be addressing those concerns.

What are the specifics, then, of Bill 207? Bill 207 would amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to allow any of those journeymen or apprentices in those 50 registered trades that we have here in Alberta, those 50 trades that have apprentices and have journeymen that are registered in the province – those people would be able to receive a nonrefundable tax credit for any amount of money over \$500 spent on the purchase or the rental or the replacement or the maintenance or the insurance of those tools that they purchased for work during that tax year. The tradespeople would have to provide receipts for any of those tools purchased within that tax year in order to receive the credit. We know that doesn't differ from all sorts of businesspeople that must keep their receipts as well. In order to get that tax credit, they'd have to have these receipts. They'd also have to have a certificate from their employers stating that those tools purchased were in fact necessary and to be utilized on the jobsite.

Mr. Speaker, when the Alberta Tax Review Committee handed in its 1998 report on the state of income tax in Alberta, it recommended that there would be no new tax credits introduced, and that wisdom prevailed through the introduction and the amendment of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. That certainly parallels the federal experience that I just spoke about with Bill C-205. There was opportunity to initiate the changes, but they were not taken up, and it had been left to a private member's bill or, subsequent to that, some initiative by the government themselves to do so. The intentions of the committee can be understood, but in the case of the journeymen, Alberta's registered journeymen, and the apprentices there's more that we can do. The high cost of the tools which they must have in order to work puts them at an unfair disadvantage when compared with other Albertans.

Let's consider an example of the high costs of these tools and look at the Canadian Auto Repair & Service council's 1999 report. It was entitled *Bridging the Gaps*. In that report the council noted that a little bit under 40 percent of all automotive technicians and apprentices in Canada pay somewhere between \$1,000 and \$2,500 for tools every year, and in fact about a quarter of the technicians pay over \$2,500 every year. If we put those figures together with another statistic, that over 50 percent of all automotive technicians would pay more than \$20,000 for tools they have to have in order to do their jobs, that's a staggering number, but even more obvious that this is an important bill to consider is that about 10 percent of those technicians would pay in a lifetime over \$50,000 for tools.

Most registered journeymen in any trade – and it doesn't matter which one of those 50 trades we speak of – would have about \$10,000 worth of tools at a minimum in order to do the job that they

are asked to do by their employer. If we consider, though, that the average income for these workers is around the \$35,000 per year mark, we see that this is a considerable expense for these employees when compared to the salaries earned. Much of their income has to be put directly back into creating that income.

If we consider also the Automotive Industries Association of Canada report to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance in Ottawa, we see in that report that the AIA has noted that entry level apprentices typically need a starter set of tools before they'll even be offered a position. The AIA reports that this set of tools will generally cost around \$4,000. So when those apprentices go out on their first job, their first bill is for a huge set of tools requiring at least \$4,000 on average. I think everyone understands, Mr. Speaker, that \$4,000 is quite a lot to any young person about to start out in a trade let alone a set of starter tools that he or she might need just to get going in that job.

The high cost of tools deters young people from entering the trades. If we do not provide support through a tools tax credit or some other mechanism, we would risk losing potential workers, workers that are necessary for our continued prosperity. When we read articles almost daily but certainly weekly in our local papers, we know about the need here in Alberta to acquire more tradespersons. We need people to work in our resource sector, to help build our infrastructure, to help build our homes, our communities. Without them and their contribution to our province our economic momentum will stall, because their skills are sorely needed as we move towards the expansion of our industries.

With the cost of their tools running so high, it's clear that tradespeople need our help. It's a problem that we can remedy, and we should do so. Mr. Speaker, the creation of a tax credit for the benefit of trades journeymen would recognize the continued growth in trade heavy employment sectors; for example, goods production, the forestry industry, logging, the oil and gas industry, in construction and also in manufacturing.

Some members might argue against the bill, Mr. Speaker. They might say that it'll be difficult to administer a tax credit because administration costs might be high or perhaps because workers would have to go through all the hassle of keeping those receipts. Getting certificates from their employers might be a little bit of a problem as well. But really would it be all that difficult, and how many people keep those receipts for income tax purposes already because they have a business and are able to make those deductions? Would it be any more difficult than administering the education tax credit for example? I wouldn't think so. It might be a little trouble getting used to doing it, but that would be about all.

If it's really that difficult to administer, then the argument would hold for almost any other kind of tax credit. Those tax credits are justified and therefore they exist, and taxpayers appreciate that they have the opportunity to be recognized for those costs. While the tax credits depend upon eligible tradespeople keeping their receipts, I think any reasonable person would understand that if they're able to have the tax credit, they will keep those receipts and they will make use of them when they do their income taxes. If this bill were to pass and they had the opportunity to deduct those costs of tools, we would see a much more formal bookkeeping system being initiated immediately, and probably all those folks already keep track of their costs just for their own personal purposes.

Now, if we consider that the beneficiaries will most likely be those young men and women who are attempting to build that career, to enter through the apprenticeship process and start off on a career in the trades – or perhaps it may even be an older person who is supporting their family, their spouses and their children – we realized that a tax credit will be a real benefit to them. It would be

a relief to them for those high costs of tools, and Bill 207 is a mechanism whereby we can do that.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I think then when we consider those facts, we understand that Bill 207 is a viable bill, a mechanism that we would encourage to be promoted and to be sponsored by this Assembly. These benefits ensure that more Alberta families will be able to enjoy our Alberta advantage. They will not have to stretch their budgets, because those work-related costs do so to those journeymen and apprentices. It would also make sure that our young people would recognize that their trades are appreciated and recognized through the income tax system so that even their costs would be deductible from their income tax.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill. I know that many members assembled wish to speak to the bill and contribute their personal experiences and their thoughts, some that are journeymen themselves, some that have family members involved in trades, and others that have heard from their constituents that this would be an appropriate way to go. I know that many of these people wish to speak to the bill, and at this time I'd take my seat and allow them to do so.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to compliment the hon. member for bringing forward Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. In speaking to this bill, we are looking at a bill that we would normally see under federal legislation, not provincial legislation. It certainly is a bill that does have some merit, not only in the area of tradespeople but I think in many other different areas. People would like deductions for workplace expenses and do require them. We had an hon. member earlier this week bring up the fact that teachers on the average spend in the neighbourhood of \$600, I believe the figure was, out of their own pockets in providing materials for the classroom. Certainly that would be an honourable tax deduction as well, for the moneys they paid to assist in their classroom.

Now, the member also made some very good observations here that this would certainly enable various young people to enter the trades, a system with very heavy expenses at the front end of their training and, as well, on the front end when they do become journeymen. It certainly is an issue that bears merit from the fact that particularly in these boom times here in Alberta we are experiencing a severe shortage of skilled workers, of tradespeople, and this in itself leads to many situations that this bill would help address. Of course, with the shortage of skilled labour and tradespeople all construction costs in this province are driven up. As well, with the training that we've had over the past number of years for tradespeople and the demand being quite small, young people have chosen not to go into this particular field, and I'm sure the costs have a bearing on that.

As a result, the average age of tradespeople in this province is somewhere close to 50 I would believe. We as legislators have to look forward and see that very soon in this province we're going to have a tremendous shortage of tradespeople, and certainly anything that would help attract these people into studying to become a tradesperson or entering an apprenticeship program is laudable and is something that we should look into.

What I wish I could have seen in the bill or heard from the member is specifically what stakeholder groups he spoke to before

drafting this bill and presenting it here on the floor of the Legislature. I don't see any indication of that, and certainly I know that this is an issue. There must be many, many groups out there that would be more than willing to assist in drafting this legislation and perhaps would bring in some intricacies that we haven't thought of. So I would definitely want to see more input by stakeholder groups. I notice also that none of the people from the building trades seem to have put forth any submissions to the hon. member. So I do have some reservations when I see this.

As well, what I don't see here is any type of an impact study on what would happen if indeed we introduced this legislation and how it would affect the administration, as he pointed out. As well, I would have liked to have seen, because it is a provincial bill, how this would affect provincial taxes for this particular group and to see what the overall costs would be. So those are two reservations I certainly have about Bill 207.

Then, as well, I look here and I see that section 2 of this amendment act would be the only real amendment to the Personal Income Tax Act, and it would simply add section 10.1 after the existing section 10 of the act. It defines tools as "portable equipment used in the performance of a tradesperson's occupation."

So I think this bill certainly does warrant a second look. I certainly think it would help address the situation that we are currently facing in this province, where there is a severe shortage of tradespeople. Also, it would provide us with a steady supply of tradespeople in the future, because we know we're going to have a huge turnover in the number of tradespeople because their average age is so high.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I think what this bill would provide is what all of us in here want for our youth, and that is opportunity. If this is a bill that will assist in more young people in Alberta getting trained here, living here, staying here, and providing their services to the community, then I certainly would support it.

Those are my comments and observations at this point on Bill 207. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

4:40

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. Some very valid comments, and I'm sure that they can be dealt with. I want to also mention the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

It's a long overdue bill, Mr. Speaker, and I was very happy to hear that this bill was being brought forward as a private member's bill. Not only in the campaign but in my previous business experiences I've had occasion to deal with many, many journeymen from the different vocations. It is a very large problem, very much more so for some of the mechanical areas than maybe for the large chunk of the 50.

But that said, I think I'd like to approach this more with kind of the W5 approach: who we are affecting, why, what, and wherefore. And I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry that this should be a federal bill. Obviously, all apprenticeships and tradespeople across the country are faced with this issue, but I really don't think we'd do any good by dragging our feet and hoping someone else brings forward a bill. As was stated before, it got to the Order Paper, so there's definitely merit in it. I think if we can proceed with this bill and maybe work out the kinks and make it presentable, our provincial colleagues and our federal cousins may come forward and say that it's a bill whose time has arrived, so let's look at it that way.

I think Alberta should maintain its leadership role in programs like this, so let's go with that.

Now, what are we going to accomplish with this bill? What we're going to do is put people to work. We try so hard in this country to create jobs and to provide incentives. Here we've got people that are ready to go to work, and maybe the only thing holding them back is the amount of money it takes to outfit their particular occupation. You know, we seem to consider education an investment in the future, which it is, Mr. Speaker. Well, these people are investing in their education right now, and we don't have to wait two or three or four or five years for them to get a job. Their education is part of their job, and they need the tools to complete that.

So we're accommodating people that are already in the workforce, and who are these people? We probably all know some. We could probably list many, many apprenticeships. I've got two or three nephews that are in the 19- to 23-year-old age group that are in apprenticeship programs, and I know many other young people from our community as well as many middle-aged or older people that have just decided it's time for a change. The graduation ceremonies at Lakeland College that we attended here this spring showed how diverse the age group and the population were in the apprenticeship programs. It's not specific to one age group, but by and large it's young people picking an occupation.

Now, the one thing I've seemed to notice in our community – and I'm sure it's much the same around the province – is that these aren't the wealthy people. These are kids that have an idea that they want to be something, and they want to go to school and get out and make a living. Often it's a time of their life when they're wanting to start a family, maybe, or set up a home with someone, and already they're behind the eight ball. "Can we maybe put a down payment on a house, or do I have to buy tools?" It's a very small amount of money, maybe, to someone who's established in business to spend \$3,000 or \$4,000 on wrenches, but to someone just starting with an idea, it's a lot of money. So I really think if we can accommodate that and give them a chance, then we're doing a good thing.

Now, the "when" of this. When should have been 20 years ago when we set it up. We didn't do that. When should be now. So let's go forward with this, and let's be very constructive in notifying our neighbour provinces and the other provinces of Canada and the federal government, through our government departments, that we feel this should be a national program. I think it should fall under a straight tax deduction. I know that a tax credit may be all we can do, but to make it simpler, that's really what it should be.

We want to talk a little bit about how else it will affect people. The hon. member mentioned before about some of the prices. Well, I've checked with not only the college in Vermilion but many of the businesses in my constituency to see just how much it really is and how much it is a part of their educational communication with their instructors while they're attending college. Mr. Speaker, in our community the average start-up set for the automotive mechanics was between \$4,000 and \$7,000. Now, they had to have that before any of the businesses in town would take them in and enroll them in the apprenticeship program. Still, with \$4,000 or \$5,000 they had to spend early in their careers as high as \$4,000 a month, and even the most seasoned tradespeople were spending an average of \$2,100 a year on their tools. So it never seems to quit. I think that many of these tools grow legs and leave the jobsite by themselves. That's what they tell me. I know it happens. I've tried to keep tools in my garage. The average value of all of the mechanics' tools in the automotive industry there was \$16,500, but if you just considered the top journeymen, it was around \$30,000.

Now, the start-up set for the heavy-duty mechanics is a little more. It's around \$7,000 to \$10,000. That's a good chunk of change when

you've just been in school or when you've just started a job. It's a good chunk of change any time. They also had to spend considerably more per year on either the purchase of new tools as equipment designs changed, or maybe their expertise became more involved from engines to transmissions or such, and they spent on average between \$2,500 and \$4,000. Their tool sets ended up at around the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range.

Those are the most visible, the mechanics. But there are other types of mechanics that require very specialized tools, too – and we're very lucky in Alberta to have such programs in our colleges and universities and technical schools – particularly motorcycle maintenance, not a very common thing, but the tools are very expensive. Outboard marine courses.

MR. CENAIKO: Motorcycles break down.

MR. SNELGROVE: They sure do.

There are many other mechanically inclined vocations that do have a huge requirement for tools, so it's important we cover the whole spectrum and keep the emphasis on the connection to the apprenticeship program and tradesman certification. Just for an example, let's talk about electricians. Many people would say: well, all they have is a tool belt. For many electricians that might be all they have. It may only take them \$500 to purchase their tool belt and get a set of tools and go on their job. But out where we are, Mr. Speaker, sometimes the electrician has to be a little more independent, and depending on his tools, whether it be meters or drills or a saws-all, stuff that they would use in their daily work and that small electrical contractors may have one of but not two, it brings them a lot more job security or a lot more hirability if they have extra tools that they bring with them to the job. When you start to add some of these tools to their inventory, you can get into \$2,000 or \$3,000 or \$4,000 just like that.

The other thing that an inventory gives a young person with a genuine interest in it is portability. If you're working at a site where they own the tools, where they have everything there, where you may take them and do the job but they all go back, you're kind of indentured to them I guess would be the term. So by allowing them to start to build their own tool base, we may be actually encouraging many more independent small contractors to come out of the apprenticeship system and contribute to our economy. You know, it's a long-term thing to build a good, balanced small business base in any province.

The other thing we have to keep track of – it's not just tools. The safety aspect of our industries has changed dramatically in the last few years. I know that in our business, Mr. Speaker, to do any work on oil sites or refineries or such, you have to have these special coveralls. You've got to have the glasses and the boots. These coveralls can only be used so long. Once they've been washed or once the inspector feels they're a little tarnished, it's out the window, and they're several hundred dollars a set.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: How much?

MR. SNELGROVE: Several hundred dollars a set.

So we have to keep in mind that some of these tradespeople that work in those environments have costs that are exclusive, that are not inclusive to anyone else in Alberta.

The other thing that can happen in some of the businesses are the special tools dealing with high voltage. You don't buy the \$2.99 pliers from the discount store; you buy the \$35 or \$40 pliers that'll keep you alive. So there are a lot of things that make the expense and change it.

4:50

The other thing that I certainly don't really know is: what happens in the technical system? As we look around the room, we've got most of the people on laptops. I'm not sure what kind of meters and what kind of testers it's going to take in the future to see if the computers are all working properly or what it takes to fix them, what it takes to check the instrumentation at a water treatment plant, things like that. I don't know, Mr. Speaker, but I wouldn't want that price to be a hindrance to a journeyman or to a tradesperson going down that road towards that. I'd like to think that we have an open mind here in Alberta about pushing people towards independence and allowing them to do their jobs properly.

When I discuss with the teachers at Lakeland College about: "What are students saying to you? Are the tools the drawback?" many of them are saying, "Yes, I can complete the schooling, but there is no way I can get \$3,000 worth of tools." So maybe if ma or pa can get a receipt, it'll help him out.

There are other tradespeople, like welders – in many, many cases welders have formed their own businesses or companies. They've got their truck and their welder and they're on the road. But I think we should make it fair for those that don't want to go through the expense of incorporation and allow them to deduct. A welding truck could easily set you back \$50,000 or \$60,000, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAYLOR: That's just for the truck.

MR. SNELGROVE: More if you want a welder, I guess.

It's that these vocations do become very expensive, Mr. Speaker. I would hate to think that just because of bureaucracy we have to force them into a corporation or a company to get the deductions to do exactly the same job as they're going to do. It's just a cost we put back on ourselves.

Some of the other industries in the apprenticeship board have said that it could get very expensive to do specific jobs. The flooring industry: people that do tile. As you've seen out in our lobby, some of the carpet-laying equipment can be very expensive to purchase. It's fine if you work with a big company that provides that, but if you're one that wants to work out of your truck or even work as a contractor, not a company, for a supplier, you need all those tools yourself.

I would only say this, Mr. Speaker. The presenter of the bill made a case that could stand on its own. I don't think that we need to rehash much of what he said. It's a very timely bill. It was very much supported by the industry and by the teachers in the industry. I think my point today is: let's move this forward. Let's make it a very presentable bill to the rest of Canada, but more importantly, let's make sure that Albertans trying to work have every benefit that we can give them as a provincial body.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close, thanking you for the time and encouraging the rest of the people to join me in supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 207. I believe that this is an important bill which will spur greater economic growth in this province by introducing another mechanism of tax relief to the hardworking Albertans who must regularly purchase, repair, and replace expensive tools. The creation of a tax credit for the benefit of trade journeymen would recognize the continued growth of our trade-heavy employment sector. It is for this reason that I will support Bill 207.

No matter how capable or educated, tradespeople in this province

often cannot find employment unless they have their own set of tools. I know that while I was campaigning, I did stop at quite a number of places such as service stations and other industries in my constituency. That was something that some of the apprentices, especially the mechanics, came out and said: you know, it would be nice to have some relief on the cost of the tools. Because technology changes daily, they're finding that they're having to buy, especially right now – when you look at some point in time, I was able to repair my own car. Now, unless you have electronic computer gadgets, because that's what your car is built with right now, it's physically impossible for everybody to have that piece of equipment. Certainly, right now the mechanics that are the journeymen that have gone through NAIT are finding that they have to have these tools if they're going to be working. Certainly a lot of the service stations, the dealerships do provide that type of equipment, the larger type of equipment, but the smaller, handheld equipment that are electronic can run in the thousands of dollars, and they are essential for what the mechanics are doing.

Each year it is estimated that the average tradesperson spends over \$500 for new tools. Bill 207 will help relieve some of this burden on trade journeymen and apprentices, who are so very important to the continued success of Alberta's economy. As I have said, tools are expensive, and it is difficult for those who are new workers and are finishing an apprenticeship to obtain a job without having a personal set of tools. I have a concern that this initial cost for tools is such a barrier that it could deter new generations of workers from the trades. I believe Bill 207 would provide just the incentive we need for a new generation to choose a trade as a career.

I was listening to CBC radio last week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: What?

MR. BRODA: Yes. You should listen to it sometime.

They were discussing the need for trade workers in Alberta. Their main topic was on our current growth and development compared to other provinces. A major concern that was raised and a concern that I share is that there are not enough people learning trades right now to fill the positions being created. There has been an overall increase in enrollment in schools like NAIT and SAIT over the past decade; there is still a shortage of skilled tradespeople. The experts who were commenting on this problem were particularly worried that they would not be able to attract new people fast enough, and even then they would have to wait for them to finish their apprenticeship. Apprenticeship levels have been increasing over the last decade but are still not where we need them to be.

The chances for placement are substantially increased for those who have acquired tools of their own. This is often an unattainable expectation for a new apprentice and worker but is becoming more the norm in the trade industry. As trades specialize more and more and technology increases, there is a greater need for each employee to have their own tools and the equipment necessary to do their job.

Employers are increasingly placing the responsibility on the employees to purchase a personal set of tools because it alleviates their burden of purchasing, replacing, and repairing expensive tools. Not only that, but I think the individual, the apprentice or the journeyman, once they have their own tools, they look after them a lot better. The employer is saying: if I provide the tools, a lot of times they're being lost. The apprentice or the journeyman would say: those are my tools; I will look after them.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that because employers necessitate that those who work with them purchase their own tools, the growth potential for new generations of trade workers in our province could be weakened. Bill 207 would help our province's chance to stop the

widening shortage of workers in this sector. The value of stimulating new generations of tradespeople in our province cannot be overlooked. I believe that Bill 207 is an investment in the growth in the future of apprenticeship trade workers in this province, and I would encourage everyone in this Assembly to support Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 207, presented by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. The bill is called the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, and I believe that this bill is a positive step towards greater development of the trade industries in our province. Much of our revenue, everyone knows, is derived from trade-heavy employment sectors. Our province could only benefit if we support this bill because we would be supporting the trade sector in so many ways.

Our province has benefited by efforts to keep personal taxes as low as possible for Albertans. We have made every effort to do that, and it's certainly – as in the news and from reports that came across in the papers today – indeed an attractive place to be and certainly an attractive place to live and work. So by this bill we want to extend that tax advantage, if you will, to those who are working in the trades or to those who are training to work in the trades. The money that these tradesmen, journeymen, and indeed students of the trades would be able to keep in their pockets or spend with their families or in the improvement of their quality of life or indeed of their workplace would improve the quality of life that they enjoy, that we all enjoy. It would certainly generate more spending within our economy, and that's always good news indeed.

I also support Bill 207 because I believe that it is important for our province to support the development and the continued growth of the trades-heavy economy of our province. It is usually the responsibility, as was pointed out earlier, of the employee to purchase the tools that are necessary for their work. Often the apprentice or journeyman tradesmen cannot find employment unless they have their own personal set of tools. By having their own tools, they are investing not only in themselves to become better and more capable trade workers, but they are giving employers alternatives in an essential sector of our economy.

I would like to digress for a moment, Mr. Speaker, to mention that this is something that I highlighted when I brought forth my sponsored bill, Bill 202. The origin of that bill, the genesis of it, came from a young high school graduate who wanted to go into the trades, who had registered in an apprenticeship program, had to pay for his instruction fees – his tuition, if you will – and he also had to buy a car that would take him to his place of employment. He also had to pay in large sum for his own tools, and that was a great outlay of money. I might add that he also was expected to pay a very high insurance rate premium for the car that was to take him to his place of work. However, that's another topic that we have discussed, not thoroughly though, in this Assembly.

Why I reference it, Mr. Speaker, is simply because I believe that if we as a province are looking to make it a worker-friendly, a tradesperson-friendly circumstance and environment to encourage young people to work in the trades that we so desperately need their expertise in, then we should be looking to the likes of Bill 207. We should be voting in favour of it in order for us to give them one more opportunity, one more occasion, to say to them that we respect the costs and the outlay that they must put towards their work and that we appreciate the work that they do on behalf of all of the industries that involve the trades.

I would like also, especially at this moment, to mention the oil and

gas sector, which is dependent upon skilled tradespeople to provide the expertise necessary to extract and utilize our natural resources. I feel that it is important to provide easier access for young apprentices in these trade sectors to ensure that these industries are getting the skilled support they need.

The trades, as I said, are so important to our Alberta economy. Not only are they important to our economy, but they're very important to our own domestic circumstances, because for all of us who are domestic engineers, we do know that we need the skills of tradespeople who come to our homes to assist us in those areas that we need. So even if we take it out of the heavy equipment industry sector and put it into our own respective homesites, we realize the importance of tradespeople.

We want to increase the future enrollment in trades schools and those seeking apprenticeship positions. As a province which is so dependent on the work of skilled tradespeople, we must continually look for new ways to attract the number of workers we need and to keep their skills in our province. I believe, should we pass Bill 207, which I'm hoping everyone will agree to do, we should in effect create again an environment and an attractive aspect of our work environment in this province that would see young people – and older people, too, who wish to seek anew the learning and the development of their skills in these trades – seeking to come to our province, and certainly then it would respond to the needs that we have in our various sectors.

The tools and equipment that tradespeople require to work are expensive. I shan't repeat the numbers that have been identified by my colleagues, who have spoken with those who are instructors and those who are practitioners in the trades. They have identified quite ably the cost and the expensiveness of tools to be used in the trades. But we also know something further, Mr. Speaker, and that is that the equipment or the tools that we use and the equipment that they are working on often need to be replaced or repaired in order to create a level not only of efficiency but appropriateness and currency and certainly to be able to respond to the mechanisms that we have in our communities and in our workplaces. So with this constant renewal or, as they say when we speak of the technology industry, the evergreening of the trades sector and the equipment that they use, that does require some additional and some new tools, and they are a constant expense to those who are working in the trade.

In order for our province to continue to attract a new generation of people into the trades, we need to remove the barriers that the young Albertans face. I feel that this would be an attractive element, should we pass this Bill 207, because it would be another occasion on which people would be able to not just speak of but experience the Alberta advantage. In other words, it would say to our young people and to our tradespeople what we know and we believe, and that is that we value their skills. We appreciate their attention to and their contribution to our economy, and we are willing to do something about it so that through a rather fair and more equitable and appropriate way the expenses that they do incur in order to provide their services at the workplace can be recognized.

I believe that Bill 207 is an important step in helping generate new interest within the trades sector. As technology improves the goods-producing industries – forestry, oil and gas – in our province, we need to ensure that there will be enough new people coming into the trades to support these industries and certainly to support our fast-growing leadership economy in this province and, I might say, in this country and indeed across the continent.

5:10

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again encourage everyone in this Assembly to support Bill 207. It speaks to our

young people. It would make it more attractive, I think, and more viable and possible financially for them to enter into a trade. It would endorse in a very concrete way our appreciation and our recognition of the important role that tradespersons play in our economy, and it would acknowledge in a more equitable fashion the way in which we choose to encourage and to endorse those working in the trades within our province. Again, I can't say often enough: I hope everyone here will support the bill brought forth by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. He is aware of it. I hope you are aware of it, too, and that we can all support this endeavour as we look to the tradespeople of Alberta.

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

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak in support of Bill 207. It's been my career prior to this career to be involved extensively in an industry and a business where tradespeople were our lifeblood. I started in 1965 in the trades, and of course, as you would realize, at that point in time there wasn't much support for these types of initiatives.

MR. LUKASZUK: I wasn't around then.

MR. KNIGHT: No. You probably weren't here.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding that, we started a business in 1971 and employed over the years as many as 50 tradespeople at a time. Probably in that 30-year stretch we have seen in the neighbourhood of a hundred young people come through our doors, start out as apprentices, and continue through the trade training process, all to become very productive members of the province of Alberta's success story.

I would say that it could have been a lot easier for them to continue and to get their training if they'd had an opportunity to be able to have legislation such as this in place supporting them with respect to their taxes paid on their tools, taxes to be returned to them or credited to them. The purpose of the bill, of course, is to give these tradespeople relief from the expense they incur when they buy tools to start and continue their career in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would amend division 3, section 10, of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and the credit would be available on money spent over a \$500 threshold and would be classified as a nonrefundable tax credit. Bill 207 allows the province, which has already extensively reduced taxes as a means of spurring economic growth, to introduce another mechanism of tax relief to Alberta workers who must regularly purchase and repair or replace expensive tools. There have been many positive changes to the tax system in Alberta, and this proposed amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act would ensure that Albertans continue to benefit from these changes.

Mr. Speaker, tradespeople are often required to purchase, upgrade, and update tools and diagnostic equipment every year to continue their chosen trades. As already stated by my colleagues, practising technicians and apprentices can pay thousands of dollars in tool costs each year. Bill 207 would give relief to the people in the industry who must buy tools to start, support, and continue their careers.

Since many apprentices and tradespeople must have their own tools and equipment to begin working, an initial barrier exists for Albertans who do not have the money to invest in tools. Contractors and businesses require that employees supply this expensive equipment for a variety of reasons related to costs and commitment. This tax credit could assist employees, investing in their future and the productivity of Alberta.

The added benefit this credit has is that it is especially important to the low- to middle-income earners. These are the people in Alberta who most need the relief. They are the ones who experience the most severe negative impact related to the cost of tools.

Mr. Speaker, industry groups are in favour of the introduction of a tool tax credit. Industry leaders see the absence of a tool tax deduction as a factor that places several trades at a disadvantage when competing for the next generation of trainees and employees.

Here in Alberta tradespeople have played an essential role in economic growth. It would be a distinct disadvantage to experience a labour shortage in these industries. By introducing a tax credit for tradespeople, the government has the opportunity to attract new workers from inside the province along with skilled workers from outside the province and across North America.

In the Economic Development business plan for 2000-2003 the mission of the department was "to promote Alberta's continuing prosperity." An excellent way for the government of Alberta to follow up on and continue with the promotion of Alberta's prosperity is to give a tax credit to hardworking tradespeople in this province.

Mr. Speaker, as technology advances and there are more and more technological aspects to our daily lives, the diagnostic equipment that's required for tradespeople and technicians to work with gets much, much more expensive. As our demographics change, the situation with tradespeople is very similar to that of teachers, nurses, and other professionals where there are more people retiring and moving out of the field than we have moving in to replace them.

It has been stated in this House today, Mr. Speaker, that \$53 billion of capital investment can be expected in the province of Alberta over the next 10 years. We are already short of tradespeople and people to get involved with that capital expenditure, and this is one way that we could help relieve that shortage.

Mr. Speaker, as has already been pointed out – but I think it's important to re-emphasize – there was a movement at the federal level to give just such a tax credit to tradespeople, specifically to mechanics. The deduction was to encompass maintenance, rental, and insurance costs, the full cost of tools under \$250 or such inflation adjusted limit as is set by regulation, or the capital cost allowance of tools over \$250 as set by regulation.

5:20

Unfortunately, the bill died on the Order Paper, but it has been recommended for years to the federal Minister of Finance that changes be made to the federal Income Tax Act to provide for tax credits for mechanics' tools. Alberta can take a step where the federal government appears reluctant. We can help the workers of the trade industries by having a tax credit on the tools that they need to keep their businesses and careers going.

Mr. Speaker, I have not much more to add. I would just like to say that I think this bill deserves our attention and our support. I would say that it's a very well-drafted piece of legislation, the evidence of which is it only took a page and a half of paper with respect to getting it out to us. So I think that was a plus in itself.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an extremely productive afternoon with much co-operation and some

very excellent debate. In view of all of that, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and that we adjourn and that when we do reconvene this evening, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion proposed by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

