

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

### head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Hon. members, at the conclusion of the prayer, would you please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Lord grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please join in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all thy sons command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

### head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly the former Member for Calgary-Montrose, Mr. Rick Orman.

Mr. Rick Orman was elected to the Alberta Legislature in May of 1986 for the Calgary-Montrose riding. Following the election and during his distinguished career, he was the minister of career development and employment, minister responsible for lotteries, major exhibitions, and fairs. He also held the portfolios of minister of labour and minister of energy.

Mr. Orman is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 4 and 6.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 11, 12, and 13.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After question period today and pursuant to Standing Order 40, I plan to rise in the House and ask for unanimous consent to debate the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to stop making decisions that could provoke provincewide job action by teachers, interfere in free collective bargaining, and have already raised serious concerns on the part of school boards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and table five copies of the Power Pool of Alberta 2000 annual report.

I'm also pleased to table five copies of the Balancing Pool annual report for the year 2000. This is their first year of operation, and I note as I table this that the average price of electricity in Alberta today for the month is 9.2 cents per kilowatt-hour. This is about a 30 percent decrease from January 1, 2001.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table today five copies of a letter dated May 17, 2001, addressed to me and signed by Dr. Morag Pansegrau, the chairperson of the board of trustees of St. Albert Protestant schools.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. I'm tabling five copies of a resolution passed on May 20 by the Alberta Teachers' Association annual representative assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter addressed to the Premier by Mr. Will Lusena of Calgary regarding his opposition to the proposed Kananaskis FMA.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the benefit of the Assembly I have a chart today to table. It's entitled Natural Gas Prices for Electricity Generation. It's from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter by the CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board to an injured worker in Calgary. This was dated March 27 and indicated that he would be getting a wheelchair replacement. As of this date he is still waiting for a wheelchair to replace the one that was damaged, and he is a prisoner in his own home.

Thank you.

### head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured and pleased to rise in the House today to introduce to you and

through you to the members of this Assembly a group of energetic and enthusiastic grade 6 students from St. Teresa of Avila school in Red Deer-North. They are accompanied by their teachers Ms Shari Schoenberger and Mr. Ken Griffith and their parent helpers Mrs. Carol Havell, Mrs. Kate Kuhn, Mrs. Erma Brady, Mrs. Angela Alvarez, and Mrs. Laurie Gilbertson. I would ask that they all rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a number of students from the Argyll Centre in my constituency, where virtual learning is occurring. There are seven students and eight adults. The group leader and teacher is Mr. Mark Karstad and the parent helpers are Mrs. Donna Howard, Mrs. Laura Warman, Mrs. Judy Wollman, Mr. Trevor Smolski, Mrs. Cheryl Schulz, Mrs. Sati Singh, Mr. Edmund Howard, and the students. I would ask that they all rise now and receive the very warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my assistant from my constituency office, Whitney Issik. She's come to meet with some different departments and help me out in my office here in Edmonton for the day. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, Whitney.

#### head: Ministerial Statements

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

#### Missing Children's Week

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government of Alberta I proclaim May 20 to May 26, 2001, as Missing Children's Week in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our society is evaluated as a just, caring, fair, and honourable society in direct proportion to the compassion, dignity, and even love that we give to our frail elderly, to other vulnerable souls, and souls like our children. In Alberta parents support all of our children, their growth and development. Surely together our goal must be that every child grow up secure, safe, and capable of achieving their full potential, successful at life, and most of all loved by that family.

1:40

A missing child is every parent's worst nightmare. The morbid fear, the overwhelming guilt, and the anxiety consume every waking moment. Thankfully most parents and children never endure such a grievous separation. For those that do, we stand by them or perhaps we search in teams to recover the child. We all too frequently, as in the case of sweet Jessica Koopmans, attend a final service of memorial.

This week many communities are joined in raising awareness of child safety through the Child Find Alberta organization, who reminds parents and children of the importance of staying safe as families, a reminder to our communities, too, to protect their most vulnerable by staying alert to danger and by being ever watchful for a child.

Mr. Speaker, 63,712 children went missing in Canada in the past year, and 8,832 children went missing in Alberta in 1999. More data will come out on the 25th of May. While most children that were

reported missing are found or returned home, some are never found.

To this House I commit both to prompting parents and teaching children to be safe and to assisting children to understand their responsibilities and rights as well and commit to all that we will serve our children better if we join forces in this proclamation.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day, a day to celebrate those children who have been safely returned to their families, a day to offer hope to those families who are still searching, and a day to mourn those children who will never return.

Three symbols are associated with this week: a child's teddy bear, a crossed blue ribbon, and our porch lights. The teddy bear signifies the love and the security we want for all children. The blue ribbons can be found posted next to child-friendly sites on the web. The porch lights are those that we will all leave on on Friday of this week, National Missing Children's Day, to light the way home for missing children.

Tragically for us Jessica Koopmans has become a fourth symbol, a symbol that we haven't done all we can to protect our children, a symbol that reminds us we have failed to prevent evil from invading a child's world and a community, a symbol that reminds us we must redouble our efforts to ensure every child is victim proofed, and a symbol that reminds us that only through community action can we create safe, caring environments for children and prevent future tragedies. Child Find Alberta, Missing Children's Network Canada, and Our Missing Children are but a few of the organizations we can support.

We must do more. We must ensure that our schools have the resources to help children grow into healthy adults. We must ensure that child and family services are in a position to help those in need of assistance. Most importantly, we must create a community and a culture where the lives of children and families are rendered the sanctity that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### head: Oral Question Period

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

#### Water Quality Standards

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Environment confirmed that Alberta has among the highest standards of drinking water in Canada. Setting high standards is a good start but not the full solution to the problem. Walkerton demonstrates that standards alone are not sufficient protection. My questions are to the Premier. What provisions are there for safeguarding, testing, and monitoring water quality in Alberta so that we can make sure that our water is safe?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's been some time since I was involved in that portfolio, so I will have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, all the water treatment facilities are operated by trained and certified staff members. So that's the first thing: we have quality staff operating those.

The second thing is that as they do their water treatment, they are constantly monitoring their own water. We had a recent incident in

Grande Prairie where a piece of equipment shut down. They immediately knew that they had a problem, and they immediately put out a boil water order. So that's the second thing that happens: the operators constantly monitor what's happening in their own water treatment plants.

The third thing that happens is that we do spot and random checks constantly throughout this province, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that everything is operating as it should be so that Albertans can be assured of the safety of their drinking water.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: which ministry has the ultimate authority and responsibility to act when standards are violated?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there are both federal and provincial agencies that have the authority to respond, but as it relates to Alberta, to this province, it's my understanding that it is the Minister of Environment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: what are the remedies or penalties for the violation of these standards?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, relative to the intricacies and the details of fines and other punitive measures that might be taken, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, once again, we do enforce our standards through a number of procedures. First of all, if there's a problem in a water treatment plant, we will go and enforce our standards on that plant, and we will say to the municipality or whoever that you must meet these standards and enforce those standards to maintain our high-quality standards and ensure them. So through our constant monitoring, our constant spot-checks, the randomness of our checks, we very carefully monitor this.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Continuing to the Premier: how does the government's plan to increase privatization of water testing improve the safety of Alberta's water supply?

MR. KLEIN: I don't know the extent to which there are plans to privatize water testing, but I would assume – no, Mr. Speaker; that's incorrect. I wouldn't assume. I would take it as a matter of fact that whoever is contracted to test water would have to abide by the standards that would be set by the Department of Environment and to some degree, as it relates to public health, by the department of health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When they move to the privatization model, are they considering the issue of increased penalties, the addition of sanction or some means to make sure that the private sector does follow the rules that the public servants are now dealing with?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the process to ensure that the rules are being followed, again I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly as we move to privatization, it's just like anything else: it will be constantly monitored. Just as we monitor and check on our water treatment plants, so we monitor and check on the people that are actually doing the testing. Once again, the fact that we move to privatization does not lower the standards. It only allows the private sector to do that. We can all have confidence in Alberta's water.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not questioning the standards at all. The question again is: as we move to more privatization, will there be the same kind of confidence available for Albertans to make sure that their water is safe, that they'll have confidence both in the process and in the carrying out of those tests?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. I would remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that ultimately the buck stops here. Whether it's a member of the Alberta public service or whether it's a contracted service, if it is a government responsibility, the buck stops here. In other words, eventually the minister and perhaps the Premier or the government as a whole are held accountable no matter who provides the service, whether it's the private sector or public-service employees.

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

1:50

#### Meridian Dam

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. The Meridian dam, if it's ever built, would be an Infrastructure project. Why is this department not leading the feasibility study?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised by the question from the hon. member, because she's been around here for some time and should know that Infrastructure does not build dams anymore.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is the Minister of Environment leading the study into the feasibility project of the Meridian dam when his department is supposed to be protecting our water resources, not developing dam projects?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, in the first place, we're not developing dam projects, Mr. Speaker, and we are not leading a feasibility study. This is a project that has been talked about for at least 20 years. In the past there were commitments made that when Saskatchewan was prepared to contribute a certain amount of money to a feasibility study, we would go forward with a feasibility study. It should be noted also that the federal Liberal government has done a considerable amount of engineering work already in the past on this project.

Now, what we're looking at, Mr. Speaker, really is a cost-benefit analysis. What it is: how does it affect the environment? I mean, our job is to protect the environment, and before any project like that is built, we must be able to see how this protects the environment. The other part of our job at Environment is water management. So part of our job is to manage the water, which is a very scarce resource in this province, and we will do that as well.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister then: can he tell

us why his department is leading the charge on the study of the Meridian dam when he potentially stands to benefit from this project?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a bit of an innuendo there, quite frankly, and I think it's totally inappropriate. I do not in any way benefit. I'm not sure what she's suggesting by that innuendo. The dam certainly isn't in my constituency. I have no personal benefit out of this. So how would I benefit? I'm not sure, and I resent that innuendo.

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

### Teachers' Salaries

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Alberta Teachers' Association held its annual representative assembly in Edmonton, including a special session Sunday afternoon right on the steps of this Legislature. I've never seen teachers as angry as those attending the ATA assembly with what they consider to be this government's unjustified interference in their negotiations with school boards. My questions are to the Premier. Why has this government decided not to leave it up to school boards and to the ATA to decide what constitutes a fair and reasonable salary adjustment for this province's teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as has been said so strongly in this Legislative Assembly before, we are not getting involved in the collective bargaining process. What we have done is we have put in a line item guaranteeing the teachers of this province at least 6 percent and have left the flexibility for the various school boards to negotiate higher if they deem that's where the money should go. It also gives them the flexibility to put those extra dollars into other classroom activities, and it's based on the priorities identified by the local school districts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier as well. Why is the government putting the province's school boards in a no-win situation by not providing them with sufficient resources to both improve classroom conditions and pursue fair salary settlements in their negotiations with teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. leader of the third party deems to be fair, but I'm telling you that if I had in a business plan a 19 percent increase over three years, I would think that that was fair, plus an absolute figure of 6 percent to accommodate a minimum raise for the teachers. I would deem that to be more than fair, and I'm sure if the hon. member were still a university professor and if he knew for absolutely sure that he was going to get 6 percent – well, maybe not. I don't know. But I'm sure that most professors, if they knew that they were going to get 6 percent – 6 percent at least – would be more than happy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It looks like the government is ready to bring in wage controls like Mr. Trudeau did in the '70s. Why is this government determined to pick a fight with teachers by singling them out for its new policy of wage controls?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, since when has offering money been

related to picking a fight? Never. When we say, "Here's 6 percent, and here's the ability to negotiate more," that is hardly picking a fight. We have no intention of picking a fight with the ATA or the teachers. We value very much teachers in this province and the tremendous contribution they make. There are teachers in this caucus. There are teachers in the Liberal caucus. There's a teacher sitting right over there. It's a wonderful profession, it's a respected profession, and it's for precisely that reason that we put as a line item in the budget a minimum 6 percent increase for teachers. That could hardly be construed as picking a fight.

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

### Provincial Investment Returns

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province's spending budget has reached a high-water mark of \$21 billion. I feel very confident that now we have an excellent minister responsible for money generation.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I really enjoy listening to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Would you please join with me in listening to him too.

MR. CAO: Thank you.

My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Given the drastically low value of the stock market relative to its peak time, can the minister explain how Alberta's investments are affected?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to respond to the Member for Calgary-Fort. As he rightly said, our investments are substantially affected by how the market bears. Our equity markets have been down over the past year, but I would like to assure this member and all Albertans that our investments are both soundly and prudently invested. It's important to note that we have quite a diversified portfolio, not just in the equities but in fixed income, in real estate, as well as foreign and national equities. Our income is down about \$300 million over the past year, and that's in part because the previous year was such a strong year in the equities market. Even this year we will earn a \$787 million return on the heritage savings trust fund.

MR. CAO: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear that our investment is not tied into the stock market alone.

To the same minister: what is the future forecast for investment income given that the stock market is low?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a challenge to predict any markets, where they're going to go, but in our three-year business planning we do make our estimates of what we would best guess would be our return on our investments. We estimate in this coming year that we'll have about \$550 million dollars. That is once again down due to the decline in the markets, but that still is a return on our investment, because about 73 percent of our investment is in fixed income at this stage.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Based on the information that the minister stated here, what is the wisdom of taking risks with Alberta's money by investing in the stock market?

MR. MELCHIN: Once again, Mr. Speaker, it is a prudent investment strategy to invest in the equity markets. The equity markets have outperformed over the long term, and the purpose of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund is to maximize those returns for all Albertans. We should have a portion of our portfolio in the stock markets to ensure that over the long term, not just over any one year – for example, over the last three years we've had an average of about \$1 billion in returns because we are in both the equity and fixed income markets.

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

#### **Premier's Flight to Prince Rupert**

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to get clarification on issues relating to the upcoming review of the Conflicts of Interest Act. Last Tuesday the Premier indicated that he had flown on the Syncrude jet to his fishing lodge twice. This was confirmed by his chief of staff. This past Friday the PC Party vice-president confirmed that the party had paid for one such flight. To the Premier: how was the second flight covered?

MR. KLEIN: I understand the same way, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAFT: Given that the Premier has at various times said that this fund is taxable income and at other times that it is for expenses, can he tell us if it is taxable income or if it is for expenses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is taking us relative to this. This is party business. It is none of his business. It is personal business. I don't get into whether he received any money for the books he published using a tremendous amount of government research and government information. I don't know if he gets any money for his activities with the Parkland Institute. I don't care, because that's his personal business, and the business he's talking about relative to the fishing lodge is personal business. The simple fact is: those flights were paid for, and they were not paid for by taxpayers' dollars.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that this fund uses money from tax receipted donations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would assume, and I don't know how and I don't care how the Liberal Party conducts its fund for its leader. I have an idea. I don't get involved in the intricacies or the details as to how the fund is managed for me. I know it is there. There are no objections, only from the Liberal Party. They don't talk about their own fund. One day they say that it's \$500, and the next day they say that it's \$1,400. Now it's probably nothing, because they have no money.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules*

& *Forms*, sixth edition, section 410, states the following: "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities."

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

#### **Shooting by Edmonton Police**

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Solicitor General. The minister will recall that last week Mr. John Pavic, a resident of Edmonton-Rutherford, was fatally shot by an officer of the Edmonton police tactical squad. Edmonton police have stated that the action was justified because the police officer considered his life to be in danger. My question: given the police must have a strategy to avoid confrontation where possible, why was the police officer in a situation that endangered his life and resulted in the death of Mr. Pavic?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to provide a response to that question, but the matter is currently under investigation and is the subject of an internal Edmonton Police Service review. Also, in matters of this sort a fatality inquiry is mandatory.

I can say generally that the Edmonton Police Service and all police services across Alberta do have policies and strategies in place designed to avoid confrontation wherever possible. The chief of the Edmonton Police Service has indicated that several attempts were made to talk with the man and get him to put down the knife that he carried. It was apparently requested that the police obtain a warrant before entering the man's apartment, which they did. The police chief has also revealed that a nonlethal taser gun was used to try and subdue the man, but for some reason the taser did not work successfully. My understanding is that the result was that a police officer found himself in a hand-to-hand combat situation with a man armed with a knife and that lethal force was then used.

Mr. Speaker, as always happens in cases of this sort, the investigations and reviews will determine whether policies and practices need to be changed. I'd also like to tell the member that police are taught to protect lives and not to take them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

#### **Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has touted the AISH program as being a nationally recognized program providing adequate compensation for people with disabilities, yet my colleagues and I receive calls on a regular basis indicating that with escalating costs \$855 monthly is not enough to live on. My first question is to the minister of human resources. How can the minister expect people in this province to live on \$855 a month?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the hon. member and for all Albertans I think we have to expand a little bit on the AISH program. When it is put in such a way in which the question indicated, one would then think that that was the only asset that an AISH person might be eligible for. If that is the case, then I would hope that hon. members would bring situations like that forward, because what we find in an overwhelming majority of cases is the fact that along with that income we have provided some assets that

can be exempted from consideration of this person's overall total portfolio. One very, very key ingredient to that is that an AISH person in Alberta could have up to \$100,000 of assets and not be deducted in any way. So I think in the matter of fairness – and certainly I know that the hon. member has always shown himself to be one that wants to be fair in these matters – it's important to have a look at the overall situation of an individual or that individual within their family.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Community Development. Does the minister disagree with the strategy to revise AISH as set out in the Full Citizenship March 2001 document prepared by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities?

Thank you.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities does an incredibly good job in reviewing all the issues that pertain to the disability community, and in fact the member across the way would be very interested to know that we have again taken the lead in this important area by creating now the Alberta disability strategy. It's not yet ready for public release, but I'm sure he'll find some comfort and some greater expansion on the issues in that report once it's finished. It's been arrived at, I should conclude, after provincewide consultations with all the stakeholders that we could possibly get to, literally hundreds of people, dozens and dozens of groups and organizations who advocate for the disability community, none the least of which is this minister.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Premier. Will the Premier clarify for this Assembly what the government's position is on AISH considering that strategy 2 of the Full Citizenship document calls for matching the Ontario maximum of \$930 per month, which is an immediate increase in pay to those on AISH of \$75 a month?

Thank you.

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, things are vastly different in Alberta than they are in Ontario. As far as I know, we're the only province that has a program that is specific to AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped. I don't know what program or programs exist in Ontario, but I do know that our AISH program is somewhat unique. Perhaps the hon. minister can shed some more light on it.

MR. DUNFORD: It is a matter of some uniqueness, Mr. Speaker. In fact, at a recent national forum the AISH program in Alberta was credited with its ability to respond to the needs of low-income Albertans. But just because we might be doing good doesn't mean we can't do better. As a matter of fact, we're about to embark on a review of all programs and services to low-income Albertans, and certainly we're going to make sure that AISH is a part of all of that in terms of investigation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

## Health Care System

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent provincial election and since, many of the residents of Edmonton-Meadowlark indicated to me that they were concerned about the future of the Misericordia community hospital, which is located in my constituency. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the status of the Misericordia community hospital and its role in the future?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Misericordia facility is an important acute care facility with the Capital health authority. The facility has recently been expanded and is back to full service status, and in this regard a number of things have happened. There's been a recent opening of a new intensive care unit at the facility. Also, three more operating rooms have been opened, and finally a number of surgery beds have been recently opened with three more to open this summer.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the same minister. As health care is one of the major concerns to my constituents, can the minister advise what progress has been made in recruiting doctors to Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. Attracting and keeping physicians and other professionals here in the province of Alberta is a top priority. The Canadian Institute for Health Information indicated that from the years 1996 through 2000, if memory serves me correctly, the number of general practitioners increased by 11 percent and the number of specialists increased by 16 percent. From 2000 to 2001, the current year, I'm advised from the College of Physicians and Surgeons through one of their quarterly updates that there were 5,205 physicians on the in-province registers, and this is an increase from the previous year of 161, or 3.2 percent.

We think that we're doing a good job in terms of recruiting physicians. We think that our overall tax structure and fee structures make Alberta a very attractive place for doctors to live and work. We've done a number of things, Mr. Speaker, in not only recruiting but also in the training and retention of physicians. The setting up, for example, of residencies for international medical graduates and also having residencies for rural physicians and increasing the number of physicians that we train in our medical schools have all helped to increase the number of doctors that we have practising in Alberta.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, last week there were media reports about the earlier than usual closing of wards at the Royal Alexandra hospital. This action was in response to the amount of overtime being worked by our nurses. As the health system cannot operate without our nurses, can the minister of health advise what strategies are in place to hire nurses to work in our health facilities?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the new collective agreement with nurses in Alberta we think will go a long ways towards helping recruit and retain registered nurses in the province of Alberta. That agreement includes a number of new and innovative recruitment strategies and retention strategies. I'm advised by regional health authorities that since the ratification of that particular agreement, a number of nurses have been calling wanting to return to work or take refresher courses to allow them to upgrade their skills so that they would be able to return to nursing. We are working with regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, on a number of fronts.

Perhaps most importantly, though, we've done a recent quality of life survey for nurses. The responses from nurses have been quite instructive and quite interesting. One of the things that nurses indicate would help with their work environment is further education. Nurses have indicated that this is very important. In that regard, we have responded fairly recently with a \$10 million program to allow nurses to further their education. That, we think, is going a long ways towards improving the quality of their work environment.

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

### Lobbyists Registry

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over two weeks ago after questions from the opposition the Premier committed to having the Minister of Government Services examine the issue of a lobbyists registry in Alberta. Indications were given at the time that this report would be completed within two weeks. My questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Well, given that it has been two weeks, could the minister report on the status? Where is the report?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly right. As a matter of fact, I believe that as of last Thursday it was 14 days. The initial intention was to make sure that we looked at the provincial governments across Canada, looking at their lobbyist registrations as well as finding out what the federal government did for lobbyist registrations. Since that first mandate was put out, we've added a few things. I recently wanted to make sure that the review includes some other key criteria, so that's why the report has not been tabled at this point.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I appreciate the additional work that the minister is putting into this. But given that we already had a report, the Tupper report, and we had a report from the Ethics Commissioner, how much longer are we going to have to wait for this information?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there are those other reports out there, that we are also looking at. Some of the scope of the work that I've expanded on is to look at the cost of such a registry as well as the bureaucracy that such a registry will put in place. Now, the other thing that came up a few days after we talked about costs and the bureaucracy was to look at a definition of what a lobbyist would be, could be, what it would look like. We're expanding our scope into that area as well, and that is a very difficult area to describe and to define. So I'm afraid it's going to take quite a bit longer before this comes forward.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, since I can't get a commitment for this session, could I get a commitment from the minister to table his report when we return for a fall session?

MR. COUTTS: I think the hon. member can be reassured that something will be made available for everyone to take a look at prior to the next session.

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

### Natural Gas Reserves

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy has just returned from his mission to Washington in which he was trying to sell more of Alberta's energy, including natural gas. The government's own data from the EUB show that proven natural gas reserves are dropping every year. At current production levels the proven reserves of natural gas would only last 8.2 years if no new gas reserves were found. The discovery of new natural gas reserves has fallen short of consumption and exports in every year since 1983. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Is the minister at all concerned that proven natural gas reserves have dropped dramatically in the last 10 years and are continuing to decline rapidly?

2:20

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to correct the member's information in that gas reserves have not dropped substantially. What we've seen with the gas reserves is that it takes more and more to replace them. So in fact two things happen. One, Alberta will always have first call on its own natural resources. Part of the prosperity is the fact that Alberta has more gas, more oil sands, more oil than what it uses itself. I know this is a foreign concept to the New Democrat member, but what happens is that the private sector invests money. That in turn creates jobs, and then the products that are refined from that are sold to other markets, with the exchange coming back to Albertans. In fact, the royalty income that Albertans enjoyed from oil and gas last year was some \$10.1 billion Canadian.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister seems unfamiliar with the statistics provided by his own department, does the government's energy policy support an increase in exports of natural gas from Alberta?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, there is always opportunity for this province to export gas, to see the building of a multibillion dollar pipeline in Alliance, that has created tremendous jobs and opportunities for Albertans. In fact, Albertans are world leaders in the technology of Arctic fabrication and the technology of pipeline fabrication and the technology of getting oil from the ground and into markets, the same as natural gas. One of the reasons that Alberta has been able to move ahead in its development of rural Alberta, the many farms that are out there, in the areas of this great province, is because of the oil and gas reserves that sit in the ground, that are worth nothing when they're in the ground and only take value once they become a marketable commodity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the minister's interesting grasp of economics, what is he doing to address the fact that proven natural gas reserves have dropped every year since 1983? I'm asking for concrete steps.

MR. SMITH: Twelve thousand gas wells will be drilled this year, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Sex Offender Registry

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Solicitor General. More needs to be done to protect society from sex offenders. Our laws today are simply not getting the job done. In recent media interviews the federal Minister of Justice, Anne McLellan, is quoted as saying that a federally administered Canadian police information centre, commonly known as CPIC, could easily provide a national and less expensive alternative to the provincial sex offender registries. Why is Alberta proceeding with the provincial sex offender registry if an existing national information base is already there?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. I'd like to tell the Assembly that Alberta has been asking the federal government since 1997 to set up a national sex offender registry. Mr. Speaker, talk is cheap. We would like the federal government to take some action and put a national registry in place.

CPIC is not an easy solution. First, the database that they use is outdated. The police have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the system for its current use, let alone adapting it to a new national registry. Use of the system for a national sex offender registry would require a costly upgrade. In addition, there is no present federal legislation compelling an offender to provide personal information once the sentence is complete.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the federal minister put her money where her mouth is and put the necessary legislative changes and resources in place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What benefit will there be to Albertans if a provincial sex offender registry is put in place?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government's priority is to protect Albertans and ensure our communities are safe places to live and work. With respect to a sex offender registry, our position has always been that a national registry is our first choice. The thing about sex offenders is that they do not stay in one place. A system that allows them to be tracked between provincial boundaries would be the most effective, but in the absence of a national tracking system, a provincial sex offender registry would at least enable police to track the movement of sex offenders within Alberta.

We also hope to co-ordinate with other provinces that are setting up a registry. Ontario has recently introduced legislation, and I've spoken to the justice minister there. B.C. and Saskatchewan are also looking at introducing similar legislation, and I will speak to them this week. Our hope is that by moving ahead at the provincial level, the feds will start moving ahead at the national.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. Given that my constituents have asked why chemical castration is not used as an alternative, has the minister considered this alternative?

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, but there are many details that we're looking at right now. The bottom line, of course, is to protect all Albertans. I'll be recommending to cabinet in the

next couple of weeks. Decisions about what it will look like and who will have direct access to it will be made at that time.

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

### Mobile Community Response Teams

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lack of family resource centres, family violence shelters, or ministry-operated child welfare facilities in some children's service authorities are presenting some significant challenges. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. How soon will the minister be initiating the mobile community response team pilot projects to assist youth and children and families in crisis?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As reported earlier in this Assembly, our mobile response team is going to the northeast quadrant of the city of Calgary. Currently we are almost on the threshold of getting those teams active, but the necessity of bringing all members of the team together, listening very carefully to the needs of the nonprofit groups in the provision of children's services, particularly in the McCall centre and other parts of that general geography, have taken a little longer than we'd hoped, but by later in June and clearly by July these mobile teams will be active in the city of Calgary in the summer months, when I think they'll be most effective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what are the time lines for the evaluation of the pilot projects?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, over the next two years, but clearly over the first year we'll be looking very closely at the effectiveness of that program. Added to that, we're looking at the addition of funds, about \$1.2 million this year, for the youth in transition program throughout Alberta, and I would hope that through the addition of those funds, particularly in that centre, we will also be able to look at ways and means of assisting some of the youth and see if together those programs are going to net a positive effect.

If they are not successful or don't show success in the first year, Mr. Speaker, we could certainly look carefully at whether to continue the program. But the indication from Street Teams and other CART teams, child rescue workers both with the police and so on, gives us a lot of confidence that it will be successful. So at least over two years for the pilot projects.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that some authorities must transfer children to another authority with complete services, when will all authorities become full-service authorities?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. It is a function, however, of economics. For example, in the treatment of children who have been apprehended and protected under the PCHIP legislation, we will have very specialized staff trained and very specialized facilities, and it's simply not economical to put those through all authorities. We will be looking at what is cost-effective,

what is practical, and looking at where the needs are greatest. I could look at the treatment for fetal alcohol syndrome in much the same way.

Where we have concerted growth of populations that have really special needs, then we will look at that particular centre as most desirable. Throughout Alberta the demographics are so different, the resources are very unique between the two cities and parts of rural Alberta, so to promise or commit to something in every region would be impractical. We will look at what is practically possible in all cases.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

2:30

### U.S. Energy Policy

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday in Washington, D.C., the President of the United States released the country's national energy policy. This policy document was over 170 pages long but mentioned Canada and Alberta only briefly. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy, who I understand was in Washington at the time this policy was made public. Can the minister please indicate to the members of this Assembly what opportunities this U.S. national energy policy might present to Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that you would like me to go on in great detail about this meeting, but for brevity in question period I will make it brief. Canada is mentioned in this document in chapter 8, under Strengthening Global Alliances. There is a good awareness both that Alberta is the number one gas exporter to the United States and last year was the number two oil exporter. If you combine the hydroelectric imports from Quebec into the United States, in fact today the number one export to the United States from Canada is energy. In fact, that's what puts it on the front burner of the United States today.

They're talking a great deal about an energy crunch in the United States, and it's not one where you see cars lining up at gasoline pumps and prices rising. You're seeing one more of a duck on the water, Mr. Speaker, where it's very calm on the top, but that duck is paddling vociferously underneath to keep it going. You have an aged infrastructure. You have power plants that are producing at obsolete rates. You have an obsolete pipeline structure, an obsolete delivery system. In fact, what it does deliver is a great opportunity to Alberta, a great opportunity in two terms: one, our ability to supply the resource that we have been graced with in this fair province and, secondly, to supply the strengths of our technology sector and of the people that make their living in this industry and that can work on these projects throughout Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. I wonder if the minister could indicate if in his discussion with officials in Washington there was much recognition of the role that Alberta may play in helping the United States meet its long-term energy needs.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's clearly a need. In fact, although the members of the Senate energy committee didn't mention the Member for West Yellowhead by name, I know that

they were thinking of him because they talked about the important role of coal. They talked about the diversity of supply. In fact, at a presentation that afternoon from members of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers there was a comment made by an oil sands owner, who said: the oil sands have the capability to replace all offshore imports of oil to the United States. That really got their attention.

What we see is a real need for increased awareness of Alberta – Alberta producing companies, Alberta shipping companies, Alberta pipeline companies, Alberta petrochemical companies – with U.S. legislators, with U.S. lobbyists, with those individuals. They need to know two things, Mr. Speaker. One is that Alberta is the owner of its natural resources. We can assist in meeting their energy needs, and we have the technology and processing capability to make it happen.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question. The recent release of the United States' energy policy makes mention of the United States, Mexico, and Canada working through the North America energy working group. If Alberta resources are to be protected and Albertans to receive full benefit of their use, it appears we need to be involved in the North America energy decision. Can the Minister of Energy tell the members of this Assembly if Alberta is involved in the energy working group?

MR. SMITH: It is a good question, Mr. Speaker, because in fact Alberta per se is not involved with this group, and the federal government is representing Canada. We are concerned about not having a presence. As the role of this group develops, it is key that Albertans need to be forceful in our desire to participate and willing to deliver our expertise to that table. Clearly, if decisions are being made about how Canada might fit into this U.S. national energy policy or even a continental energy policy, Alberta and the other energy-producing provinces of this land need to be and must be directly involved.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before the Clerk calls the next order of business today, earlier today in question period there was an intervention by the hon. Government House Leader, who advised me he wanted to rise on a point of order or a point of privilege. I also received such notification from the hon. Minister of Environment and subsequently received a note from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. So I'm going to look at the hon. Government House Leader and the hon. Minister of Environment. Would it be okay to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on this point.

### Point of Order Member's Apology

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon in question period I rose to ask the Minister of Environment a question which I believed I had the facts on. It turns out that I did not. It is not my intention to make unfounded allegations against any member of this Assembly, and I do withdraw my comments and sincerely apologize to the minister for that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment on this point.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I'd just like to thank the member for her comments, and I accept the apology.

## head: **Members' Statements**

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

### **Crosswalk Safety**

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, January 7, 1999, little Daniel Negash was dressed up in his very best clothes, including a miniature bow tie, and he was a very excited little boy that day because he was on his way to his very first day at a new school. He never made it to school that day, however, because as he was crossing the street in a marked pedestrian crosswalk in my riding, he was struck by a car and killed. I bring up this tragedy during road safety week to relate a serious and continuing concern of mine regarding crosswalk safety and to draw attention to a little known crosswalk safety improvement that I believe would have saved little Daniel's life that day.

I call it the modified-advance stop-bar crosswalk design. This simple \$500 improvement, designed over 10 years ago, which can reportedly reduce vehicle/pedestrian collisions in crosswalks by up to 80 percent, still has not been adopted by the powers that be in this country, nor does it appear likely to be anytime soon. I for one simply cannot understand why the delay. The simple new design does not have any negative implications that I am aware of, and I have the original pilot study from 10 years ago and the opinions of a couple of Canada's leading traffic safety experts to back that statement up. Yet we still cannot seem to get it introduced into the Transportation Association of Canada manual, the bible of the industry.

After hundreds of personal hours over several years on this issue, after protracted public discussions and arguments and my presentation of thousands of names on petitions, I have yet to hear one rational reason why such an improvement cannot be adopted. The entire experience has left me very concerned, Mr. Speaker, about the ability of the process to promote visionary and innovative improvements into safe road design, even when lives are at stake. So I appreciate this opportunity to make people aware and draw attention to the modified-advance stop-bar pedestrian crosswalk safety improvement and to let anyone know who is interested that I would be happy to send them information on this subject if they have any concerns about their children having to cross busy and dangerous crosswalks in their own community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Meridian Industries Inc.**

MRS. GORDON: I rise today to bring attention to some exciting news, the unveiling last week of a \$217 million multifaceted and value-added enterprise proposed for Lacombe, Alberta, by Meridian Industries Inc. I congratulate Meridian on choosing the Lacombe site, a move I know they will not regret. Lacombe is a wonderful community situated in the midst of some of the best agricultural land in this province, agricultural land that will in the future grow much of the needed produce they will require.

It is hard to envision a project this large: seven agrifood processing plants as well as three additional manufacturing plants. The first phase, to be constructed this year, will produce ketchup, wine, juice, potting soil, pellet fuel, and fire logs. The second phase, scheduled for 2002, will process Alberta-grown vegetables and will utilize at full capacity daily 800 tonnes each of potatoes and carrots. Eighty percent of all production will be exported. Incorporating the newest technologies from Italy, this project will not only boost economics within the local community and surrounding area but will impact greatly and benefit overall the provincial economy as well, indeed

another positive example of the Alberta advantage at work.

2:40

Again, my very best to all involved. Thank you. The overall effect and the benefit provided will be phenomenal: employment exceeding 560 individuals; local farmers growing needed carrots, potatoes, and other vegetables; secondary industry spin-offs; substantive purchasing requirements procured locally; and Lacombe being now recognized as a community with a large international global presence. I look forward to continuing to work with both Meridian Industries Inc. and the town of Lacombe as this facility becomes a reality. Only by working together can we make a difference.

### **Alberta Teachers' Association**

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, government intrusion into local teacher bargaining by setting in the budget a provincewide salary increase has been met with predictable protest from the Alberta Teachers' Association. Also predictable is that the standard criticisms of the ATA by detractors will now be given another airing. Before they rush to condemnation, those detractors might pause and reflect upon the history of the organization that they criticize.

The year 1918 is considered the birthday of the Alberta Teacher's Alliance, the year the organization received a charter from the Alberta government. The conditions the alliance sought to remedy then and in the ensuing years were draconian even by standards of the day. Teachers were forced to pay exorbitant board bills, sometimes for teacherages that were no more than shacks, or be fired. Kickbacks were being extorted from teachers' salaries by a system of double contracting. School board members threatened teachers as a matter of routine. School positions were filled by auction, with positions going to the lowest bidder. There were two salary scales for the same position: one for men and a lesser one for women.

Any insistence that those days are gone forever needs re-examining. Today the government treats teachers in ways that are just as arbitrary. Where is the logic that insists that teachers must pay for smaller classes for our children with smaller salary increases for their families? Where is the logic in awarding other helping professions double-digit salary increases while insisting that 4 percent and 2 percent over two years will suffice for teachers? Where is the logic in setting figures in the budget for teachers' salaries, then insisting that teachers bargain with local school boards?

Yes, the Alberta Teachers' Association can be tough at the bargaining table. I know; I've been there. But any fair evaluation of that organization needs to be just that. It needs to be fair. Better salaries help make teaching the attractive profession we all insist it must be. The work of the ATA on behalf of children and teachers over an 80-plus year history deserves more than a disparaging knee-jerk reaction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Debbie Muir**

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is hard to miss many local functions and meetings because of our commitment to be here while the Legislature is sitting, and I understand that expectation, but tonight I am missing a very special evening personally for a very special Albertan who is also my constituent, the internationally respected Olympic synchro swimming coach and mentor and Alberta sports hall of famer, Debbie Muir.

I wish to share the letter that I have written to Debbie, and she'll be reading it tonight.

Dear Debbie,

I am very regretful that, as your MLA for Calgary-West I am not able to bring personal words of recognition tonight . . . as many of your swimmers, friends and supporters in synchronized swimming gather in Calgary to celebrate your official retirement from the sport and, better yet, celebrate your numerous accomplishments, from local to international levels. As a "synchro parent" for many years with the Calgary Aquabelles Synchronized Swimming Club and then as judge and Provincial Association V.P., I have hundreds of proud and stressful moments I will always cherish.

Debbie, you are to be highly commended and respected for your exceptional leadership qualities. It was very hard, but I picked three most notable qualities:

- First, for your commitment of 25+ years in the sport of synchronized swimming, balancing such challenges as being mother, traveller and coach-administrator.
- Second, for your ability to set and achieve lofty goals – for yourself, your swimmers and those around you – and to stay focussed on the task and to motivate your swimmers to even higher levels of performance.
- And third, for your ability to stay true to your values despite all the international acclaim over the years.

Debbie, I am personally very proud of your leadership qualities – these and many more – and also of your exceptionally positive influence on so many women over the years. As they mature in life, they will appreciate your influence even more! Especially as they become leaders in their [own] communities!

The Provincial Government sincerely thanks you for your totally impressive contribution to the sport of synchronized swimming and wishes you continued success and good health in the future! Congratulations!

#### head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this afternoon we were given notice during the earlier part of the Routine of a notice of motion under Standing Order 40. This is the first time we've had such a request made in this session, and for members who are with us for the first time, this is a unique opportunity when a member can stand up, ask for unanimous consent for a motion, and if all hon. members in the Assembly give support for this request, then the ordinary business of the session is adjourned for the remainder of the day as we deal with this particular motion. So I am now going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to briefly move his request under Standing Order 40.

#### **Teachers' Collective Bargaining**

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to stop making decisions that could provoke provincewide job action by Alberta's teachers, interfere in free collective bargaining, and have already raised serious concerns on the part of school boards.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I would like to move that the motion that I read earlier in the House be approved. There are two main reasons. I'll be very, very brief.

The first reason for urgency is that the government's decision to limit salary increases for teachers was made after the House business for this spring session was finalized. The only way that debate in this Legislature can be held during this spring sitting on this very important issue is if members allow an emergency debate to proceed. In the interest of forestalling any job action by teachers, it is imperative that this debate take place here and teachers' concerns be addressed.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, as MLAs responsible to our own constituents we can't afford to wait until a fall sitting, which would likely not commence until mid-November in any case. By then, province-wide action, job action, could already have commenced. The important job of educating our young people could by then already be disrupted through provincewide job action. I urge therefore all members to allow a debate on this matter to proceed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

#### head: **Orders of the Day**

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

#### **Bill 207 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001**

[Adjourned debate May 16: Mr. Knight]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to speak in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. Over the last few years this government and the people of Alberta have worked hard to make this the best place in Canada to live and to do business. Government has provided sound fiscal policy and a friendly tax environment, and Albertans have given the hard work and determination. This partnership has resulted in a strong and ever expanding economy which has benefited all Albertans. We have come to call this the Alberta advantage.

The advantage is ever strengthened by the efforts of many new Albertans who have come here to benefit from what our province has to offer. While many have come to enjoy the Alberta advantage, there are people who are seeking even greater ways to appreciate the prosperity that our province has to offer. Our youth want it, and this is why I am addressing the Assembly today.

I believe we must examine ways of expanding the Alberta advantage, especially for our young, and I believe that Bill 207 would be a fine start. Not only will the bill give our youth entering the trades a helping hand, but it will also help to attract more people to our province who have been so instrumental in making Alberta the place it is today.

2:50

Bill 207 would create a tax credit that would be available on money spent on tools above a \$500 threshold to accredited members of any of the 50 apprenticeship trades or crafts in the province. This credit would allow tradespeople to obtain the tools they need to conduct business so they can set up shop and begin their careers.

First, Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would benefit our youth immensely. Our young people are frustrated by the lack of support offered for them to get starts in the trades. Many employers expect a new worker to provide all of their own tools, and for most people this can be a formidable expense and a severe obstacle. If they do not have the financial resources to purchase the equipment they need, they probably won't be able to begin their career in the trade of their course.

You know, I'm speaking from personal experience. My son, Scott, is a recreational vehicle technician in Calgary and has just finished his first year of instruction at SAIT. A local firm in the city,

recognizing his talents, offered him a position in the field, but for Scott a major problem has been acquiring the tools he needed to work on his job. For my son there are no great surprises as to what he receives for his birthday or his Christmas presents. Simply put, he receives tools. Scott is fortunate though, Mr. Speaker. Our family can afford to assist him in getting the expensive tools he needs. This is not the case for all of our youth in our province. Many of Scott's young friends in his field have expressed their frustration at the fact that there is no support for them to obtain the costly tools they need.

Bill 207 would let these young people in on the Alberta advantage. It would greatly assist them and help them to get going in their respective trades. Also, Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill will attract youth to our province from all over North America. As mentioned by other members of the Assembly, there is a shortage of skilled workers in several parts of our province, most notably in our rural areas. In order to bring these valuable entrepreneurs into our community, we must try to identify new ways to help them get started. I believe that offering a tool tax credit to journeymen tradespeople is an important way to assist these folks to get going in towns and villages. Bill 207 would be a valuable asset to all in our province, not just our youth and our new Albertans.

The government has always shown a commitment to providing an environment that lets Albertans thrive. We have demonstrated considerable courage in taking steps to expand the prosperity for the people of this province. Bill 207 would further the Alberta advantage, and I urge all members of the Assembly to support it.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tool Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001.

I first would like to commend the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for introducing this bill to the Assembly. I'm surprised it wouldn't come from a locale such as Leduc. My statistics tell me that Leduc has the highest percentage of tradespeople per capita anywhere in the province of Alberta. I don't know why so many tradespeople congregate in Leduc; perhaps because of the international airport. Not only can they fly to the northern parts of the province and other parts of the province but internationally as well, because Alberta tradespersons are recognized for their excellence in virtually every area of the world.

This bill is, I believe, a step in the right direction. It's an issue of fairness in my view. There are many people that already have this luxury in their profession, in their occupation, but tradespeople do not.

At some point in the debate perhaps the hon. member can clarify for me in particular – the purpose of this bill is to allow a tradesperson as defined under the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act to deduct the cost above \$500 of their tools used in employment. Now, is that above \$500 annually, or does it include hand tools? Because above \$500: that is open to a lot of discussion. For instance, a B welder with their own rig: would there be a total deduction for that? I doubt it. Hand tools: there are certain trade qualifications. I believe the electrician is a compulsory trade where each electrician as they come to the job is to appear with a pouch filled with hand tools. Instrument mechanics is another trade where the person is expected to come to the job with quite a wide array of tools, including electronic meters to do loop checking and whatnot. These can add up into the thousands and thousands of dollars, and as technology changes, so do the meters. So there's no doubt that

this is a bill that would help apprentices and tradespeople of over 50 different trades in the province.

I think it would be in a lot of ways a good bill because it would help enforce the trade qualifications in this province. It is my view that trade qualifications are not being enforced rigorously in this province. I look at what happened in Swan Hills where shoddy welding occurred. No one in this Assembly has proven to me that the welders who worked on that job were qualified.

We go across to the university: last year before Christmas I was reading in the university newspaper where there was some work that certainly didn't meet the standards. It was structural steel, and there were cracks in it. It had to be redone. Now, were those individuals qualified?

I'm assuming here that one has to present their certificate from the province when they do their taxes if this bill were to become law. I would have to say that I would think that any tool cost, whether it be above or below \$500, should be included here, because if I were an electrician apprentice or an instrument mechanic apprentice and I was to buy a pouch and buy all the appropriate hand tools – both of these trades are in short supply – those costs as an apprentice starting out would be below \$500.

Now, there's also the issue of auto mechanics. I believe this was where the hon. member was coming from when he introduced this bill, because auto mechanics have thousands and thousands of dollars in tools. Some of them estimate the value of their tools in excess of \$50,000. With this chronic shortage – another hon. member said earlier if we are to encourage Albertans to enter an apprenticeship, whether it's a compulsory or an optional trade, then I think this would be a step in the right direction.

I certainly would like to hear – and perhaps in second reading or in committee we will hear from the hon. member who proposed this bill – whether there has been any consultation with the automobile dealers' association, because each one of those dealers would have perhaps 20, 30 auto mechanics or technicians on site, and some of the equipment that they would have to use in their daily work would be specific to certain makes or models of cars or trucks. A tax deduction would, I think, benefit those individuals.

3:00

When you think of the cost of tools as a factor in a young person's decision whether or not they will enter a trade, I think the hon. member's purpose for bringing this forward is a very sound one, Mr. Speaker, realizing that there was a similar bill introduced at the federal level in the House of Commons this past year. However, as I understand it, the bill dealt exclusively with automotive mechanics, and this bill, Bill 207, is much larger in scope, impacting upon 50 trades under the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act.

The 50 trades that are in the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act I believe should be the only ones that would be covered in this, not individuals who are going to the minister or to the Department of Learning for whatever reason and trying to pare off sections or duties or responsibilities of trades in this province. I strongly disapprove of that. It's a way of cheapening our rigorous standards, standards that have been developed over 50 years.

In my opening remarks I talked about the respect and the recognition that tradespeople in this province get internationally, particularly in the oil industry. If we were to start this idea or notion that somehow we could take for instance the welding trade and pare off one part of it, one discipline – let's use electricians, for example. We're going to take the electricians and allow a certain group who are permitted from a minister to pull tech cable and do nothing but pull tech cable on construction sites. By that I mean install a tech cable from one instrument to an electrical panel, maybe back to a

control room. That's all they're going to do. These people – hopefully they're apprentices – are going to get no more on-the-job training than that. They're going to have these hours built up where they can challenge for their journeyman test, but they're not going to have any experience, Mr. Speaker. In that way they're going to, I believe, diminish the reputation of Alberta tradespeople and the reputation of the province of Alberta as well.

That's why I would like to see this designed so that it is only for the 50 compulsory or optional trades that are indicated. You go through this, and you think: well, maybe it should be just for carpenters or ironworkers or insulators or millwrights or sheet metal workers. But I see in the paper where cooks from Alberta are winning awards in Europe and France, as a matter of fact, in Paris, France, for the quality of their culinary talents. [interjection] Yes, it's an optional trade. A topnotch cook, maybe a sous-chef – or what do they say in Paris: a saucier? – has a need for copper pots, and they're very, very expensive. The hon. member's bill would go a long way to starting off one of these young Albertans in the right direction. I believe that if you are employed in a hotel, one of the requirements is that you bring your own saucepans.

Not only should we think of construction workers and the construction trades, but there are certainly other trades as well. We could think of a barber. How could we forget barbers in this Legislative Assembly?

MR. MASON: We haven't forgotten barbers.

MR. MacDONALD: Oh, okay.

For instance, barbers are a trade, certainly. Barbers need scissors. For instance, if I'm a left-handed barber, I may need special scissors, and I have to order those scissors. The hon. member's tax deduction could go a long way towards that.

We look at water well drillers. We look at roofers. We look at power linemen. They're certainly going to be needed in this province. Whether it's a union or a non-union trade, I think this bill, particularly for auto mechanics, would go a long way to resolving a lot of their issues when they complain about the high cost of tools.

In closing, again I would like to say that I believe the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is on the right track, and I'm surprised that the hon. Member for Leduc didn't come up with legislation such as that in recognition of the demographics of that constituency. I look forward to hearing what other hon. members of the Assembly have to say about the legislation. It is legislation that I certainly would consider supporting when you consider the number of Albertans who could benefit directly from this. They could perhaps at the end of the year have a little bit more of their hard-earned money for themselves.

With those comments I would like to cede the floor to another hon. member of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak in support of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, introduced by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I'd like to bring forth a point that I don't think has been directly touched by my colleagues yet this afternoon.

The trades professions, Mr. Speaker, are unique careers that have a rare amount of independence and responsibility. This bill recognizes this unique quality and provides a means to improve the efficiency of these occupations given these unique qualities. Trades careers are distinct in the amount of individual decision-making that

exist in them on a daily basis relative to other service careers. Tradespeople will determine how they will attack their assigned project and to some extent what types and how much material will be used. Most importantly tradespeople very often determine what tools they are going to use at their tasks.

Now, in most cases tools are first acquired during the process of training in whatever specific trade someone might be pursuing, be it construction, plumbing, mechanics, welding, or even barbering, as our member opposite has mentioned. Even in large shops tools are often owned by the worker in part because this automatically encourages workers to look after tools to the best of their abilities and in part because it's difficult to loan out tools as employees move from one task to the next. In a sense, then, all tradespeople, whether they own their own business or not, are entrepreneurs. Their skills and their tools are what they own and bring to the market. They are given a task and use self-direction and initiative to get the job done.

It makes sense, then, that Alberta should treat tradespeople as entrepreneurs and encourage them to fulfill their potential with self-initiative. The nonrefundable tax rebates on tool ownership does just that. It allows our tradespeople to take part in the Alberta advantage by decreasing taxes. As our Premier has said so often: the only way taxes are going in this province is down.

Mr. Speaker, I have many oil companies in my riding. Some of these include large trucking companies that move heavy equipment from site to site. When these companies need new tires for their trucks, it is a direct write-off as a business expense. Bill 207 would treat tools bought by tradespeople the same way it treats a trucking company that purchases new tires for its fleet. Just as the owner of the new tires, the tradesperson, the owner of new tools for work, would now be eligible for a work-related tax credit. This credit would serve as an incentive to do more and to do it better. I believe that this credit would also serve as an incentive for our tradespeople to buy all of the latest tools. It would promote the retail purchasing of some of the latest tools by our tradesmen and tradeswomen.

Mr. Speaker, I think that all members of this Assembly should support any bill that promotes lower taxes. Some have expressed an objection towards this bill, suggesting that in offering a nonrefundable tax credit for tools, the bureaucratic costs will undermine the economic benefits that this bill would bring forward. These critics suggest that it would be complicated to enforce this bill because tradespeople would have to keep their receipts and tax administrators would have to verify claims and it would be difficult to determine if tools had been converted to personal use. This argument, however, is weakened when one considers that all this bill is doing is treating tradespeople as entrepreneurs.

3:10

Already businesspeople have to collect receipts to make claims for tax returns and already administrators have to determine whether these claims are valid. If critics are suggesting that tradespeople would not be competent enough to collect receipts, as businesspeople are already doing, that is outright insulting to practitioners of trades-related jobs. I happen to think that tradespeople are very intelligent, very organized and systematic people, and that they would do a very good job at collecting their receipts and collecting their tax credits.

Critics may suggest an already existent bureaucratic infrastructure cannot be extended for tax credit claims of tradespeople, but again I disagree.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would encourage tradespeople to be innovative and to be productive in their careers. It would encourage young Albertans to enter the trades and to fulfill their potential. As I said, it would promote the retail purchasing of all the latest tools by

our tradesmen and tradeswomen. For all of these reasons and many more that my colleagues have already put forward, I urge all the members of this Assembly to support Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASYK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 207 is a bill we have to look at through the eyes of people that are involved in the apprenticeship program. When you buy tools, you look after them, and it encourages people to buy a better grade of tool such as Snap-on or Mack with a lifetime warranty. [interjections] Mind you, everybody, I don't sell the tools. I buy them, and I know from experience that they're about three times the amount of money.

It goes even further. You look at people in the fatigue inspection business. They buy a pickup coil, a black light to check drilling stems and drilling collars and different things for cracks and fatigues, but they come out a fairly hefty price. Some of the market in that area, whether it be Leduc or Red Deer or wherever you service this industry the best – if you can get these tools and have a remote type of system, you could probably go right to the pipe rack and inspect the tools right on sight, and that would incur employment.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of automotive mechanics we're not expecting them to buy a big diagnostic machine worth a hundred thousand dollars. However, when they go looking for employment, they bring along with them a toolbox full of wrenches and different gauges and a handful of things. They go to their employer and they open up the box and say: well, I can start work today; here's all the stuff that's required. It encourages the employer to give employment to this individual so he can start his practice of mechanics.

The same with plumbers. In the plumbing industry the way things are nowadays you piecemeal your work out. The journeyman would go with his hardware and his tools to a site, and he would tell the general contractor: well, I can rough all this in for X number of dollars. The general contractor would probably ask: well, what do you have for equipment? And he would say, "Well, I have all the necessary tools," by way of this bill being passed. That would incur more employment, and the chances are that within a year or two he would continue to fill his tool chest full of different things for larger jobs. Therefore, he would have more people to work for him. So probably within a couple of years he would in turn be a general contractor and have two or three people working under him and apprenticing. That's what we have to look at. That's actually the bigger picture that people tend to miss: what it's going to spur off, these opportunities for other people.

The same again with electricians, Mr. Speaker. Whether it be a house or a housing complex or if you go right to the battery, a lot of things are depending on the project. Then you look at it, and the contractor would say: well, I mean, if you want to rough in the box and rough in the wiring – like the hon. member says, you know, you would string tech cable or you would string Lumex on the different sites. You would do that to get a feeling of what the whole industry is about. That's like sweeping the floor at the stockroom, but within a few years of hard work, like most of us are aware, you become the president of the company at some point in time. It depends what you have your sights on.

Mr. Speaker, by having your sights on different goals, what that does is spur a lot of economic development, and that takes in a lot of different ministries in the government. They can hold their heads up high and say: well, this is what's happening; we're not short anymore. Right now the way it's looking, every industry is shorthanded. That's not a very good feeling, and it's not encouraging. So by passing Bill 207, we go from a pessimistic type of view

to an optimistic type of view. We look at things from being not so favourable to being extremely encouraging.

Mr. Speaker, to deduct tools for a tradesperson makes a lot of sense, because what it's going to do is get the shop people who sell the tools, the warranty people who fix and rehabilitate the tools – I can say from my personal experience that I apprenticed for electrical and for welding, but I had a corporation and was able to write off everything: the welder, the rods, the gasoline, my lunch as a matter of fact. I never finished either one of them, welding or electrical, just because neither one of them was my thing. Anyway, I ended up with a welder, I ended up with a whole pile of electrical equipment that I was able to write off 100 percent for my tax year. These things that go to the tradespeople – they have their eye on what they do, whether it be the plumber or the electrician, whether it be the welder, whether it be the fatigue inspector. The list goes on and on.

I think, Mr. Speaker, there were some comments about people who are looking at the area of being a journeyman and the tools are expensive. Well, there's a hoisting or a crane operator. It is a journeyman ticket, but to have somebody buy a million dollar crane to write it off as their pocket tools, well, I think we have to use common sense to think that we're not going to write off a crane or a picker or a dragline because the fellow has a craning ticket as a journeyman.

I think it's the hands-on types of tools that we're focused on, and what we're doing is trying to encourage it and spur economic development. A lot of people that will support this bill will see it through the eyes – and you really do have to step back and look through the eyes of people who are actually buying the tools, who are actually sitting in the tech schools about to graduate in their particular vocation.

Mr. Speaker, once all that is achieved, then I think that things could proceed very economically. I think, like I said earlier, that common sense would prevail. A lot of people that are buying these tools may not find employment immediately, may be not able to afford the fifth or sixth year of experience, but they could probably venture into the lower industries. But if you take agriculture, I'm sure a farmer would probably hire a first-year or a second-year to help him fix his tractor. When he's building a shop, I'm sure they would help him, you know, plumb it or wire it.

Things like that, Mr. Speaker, are what this government is about: to help people, to take care of these individuals. I think it's our duty and our obligation to step forward and step to the plate and say: yeah, we do appreciate you coming forward, and we recognize the shortage in Alberta. That's why bills like Bill 207 do come up, to spur encouragement.

Mr. Speaker, on that note I would like all the members to really have a look at it through the eyes of the people who are sitting in the classroom or listening to their instructor wondering what they're going to do when they finish in a month or two and give them some direction and some insight on what they want to do.

I'd like to close and ask everybody to look at and support Bill 207. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, for the last several years this government in Alberta has worked very, very hard to make our province the best place in Canada to live and to do business. Government has taken an active role in providing a tax environment that lets Alberta and businesses

thrive. We have come to call this the Alberta advantage. The impact of this advantage is visible all over our province. Edmonton, Calgary, and many other communities have seen some large, substantial growth in many sectors of their economies. Every day people from all across Canada and indeed all over the world come to Alberta to find opportunity and employment. However, there are parts of Alberta that deserve further attention in order to expand the Alberta advantage.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In my own constituency of Dunvegan and in many communities in the northern half of our province there is a great need for skilled workers in all the trades. We need tradesmen to build our homes, wire our businesses, and work on our oil and gas rigs. As proposed by Bill 207, Mr. Speaker, a tax credit would be available for moneys spent on tools above a \$500 threshold to accredited members of any of the 50 apprenticeship trades or crafts in the province. This credit will allow tradespeople to obtain the tools they need to conduct business as they set up shop and begin their careers.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would have a positive influence on Alberta and especially on northern Alberta. First of all, it would help our towns and villages keep our younger people who are interested in pursuing a career in the trades. Second, it would help us bring in new tradespeople who wish to open businesses in our smaller communities. For many years our small towns have seen an exodus of youth as they leave to go to the larger cities. Simply put, a sad fact is that our young people have to live in larger centres in order to pursue employment. Many of them would prefer to stay in their own hometowns if only there were similar employment opportunities. We must consider ways to address this situation. These young Albertans are frustrated at times that they must move to find employment and by the lack of support offered to them to stay in their communities. Bill 207 is one step that would help to address this problem.

Simply obtaining the tools necessary for many trades is an expensive endeavour and presents a prohibitive cost to many young people, Mr. Speaker. For example, an auto friend of mine has estimated that just to get the most elemental tools to work in his trade, he would have to spend at the very least a few thousand dollars, and it seems that's just for a basic set of tools such as wrenches, screwdrivers, and ratchets. That figure is also assuming that he would be working with a mechanic who already had some of the more expensive and elaborate equipment. Another friend of mine who is a locksmith by trade has told me that the base complement of tools for his position can also be in the thousands of dollars.

I believe the tool tax credit as proposed by Bill 207, Mr. Speaker, would have a direct influence on those young people who wish to enter the trades and also want to stay in their home communities. It will help to significantly lower the financial barriers for our youths interested in a trades career. Also, as I mentioned, there is a shortage of skilled tradespeople, especially in the north. In order to bring these valuable individuals into our communities, we must try to identify new ways to help them get started. I believe that offering a tool tax credit to journeymen tradespeople is an important way to assist these folks to get going in our towns and villages.

As I already mentioned, the start-up costs for those entering the trades are extremely expensive, Mr. Speaker, but the costs do not stop there. In order to stay competitive, tradespeople are often required to purchase additional and updated new tools on a regular basis. They must keep on the cutting edge of advances and innovations in their trades and have access to the latest equipment. Bill 207 would help our tradespeople address this concern. This bill would

be a significant shot in the arm to our small communities trying to keep youth interested in the trades in our towns and to bring other tradespeople in. While I realize that this bill alone will not solve all the problems facing our communities, it would be an excellent way to help those who are looking to enter the trades in those towns.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked hard as a government and as a province to develop the Alberta advantage. This bill will only further support the hard work we have all done and will truly be an aid to our rural communities. I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise in support of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. There are two points I wish to make about this bill this afternoon. First, I wish to demonstrate that the bill is consistent with the vision of fiscal conservatism that characterizes this government. The bill calls for nonrefundable tax credits. This government has already established that tax reduction is a positive goal for . . .

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt a new member, but it's necessary to sort of just review for a moment that these bills are private members' public bills. If they are either supported because it's government or opposed because it's government, that misses the point. They're private members' public bills, so if you could just keep that in mind.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. OUELLETTE: This government has already established that tax reduction is a positive goal to work toward. Bill 207 does not detract from this broad mandate at all. Rather, it serves to fill out this vision to an even greater extent.

Secondly, Bill 207 will help Alberta attract and keep tradespeople. Alberta has had enormous growth in trade-heavy employment sectors over the past few years: construction, forestry and logging operations, and oil and gas, to name but a few. This province needs workers in these sectors, and it needs them now. This bill, in offering tax credits to people in these targeted sectors, will provide a tailored solution to attracting the skills we need in this province.

This Assembly needs no lecture about the benefits of general lower tax rates. We know that lower taxes put money back in the hands of those that have worked hard to earn it. We know that we can trust Albertans with their own money, and they don't need government to tell them how to spend it. We know that lower taxes provide a positive incentive for strong investment and growth. That is why over the past few years this government has brought in policies such as the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, which will give Albertans the most competitive income tax regime in the country. Bill 207 is in tune with this vision and philosophy of putting money back in Albertans' pockets. It complements the changes that have been made to put Alberta on firmer fiscal footing.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs tradespeople in volumes like it has never needed them before. This bill would help to satisfy this overwhelming demand by offering an economic incentive for people to enter the Alberta trades labour market.

Alberta's economy has grown by leaps and bounds over the past

five years, at the furious pace of over 4 percent a year. A large part of that growth has been in the trades areas: constructing housing, installing pipelines, and maintaining machinery. In the election campaign I heard from a number of small businesspeople looking for ways to get and keep skilled employees. With their businesses growing rapidly, they need people from apprenticeship programs to enter into the trades right away. The people I met in the campaign are not isolated examples. The need for tradespeople in this province is very real. Statistics from last summer show that demand for employees in trades, transport, and equipment operating and related occupations was red hot. In June the unemployment rate in this category was at a mesmerizing low of 3.8 percent, far below the average unemployment rate for all occupations, which stood at 5.7 percent. For many . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I really do apologize for interrupting the hon. member yet again, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has expired, and you'll be able to pick up next day if you so desire.

I wonder, before we begin the next part, whether we might briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:30

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like at this time and I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three guests in the members' gallery this afternoon: Carleen Brenneis, program director of the regional palliative care program, Capital health authority; Dennie Hycha, palliative care program co-ordinator for the David Thompson health region and also president of the Palliative Care Association of Alberta; and Mr. Brian Hlus, director, government affairs, for the Capital health authority. Would these honourable guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

#### **Palliative Care**

506. Ms Kryczka moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify palliative care as a core service in each regional health authority to ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services for end-of-life care with access to palliative community services (palliative home and hospice care), acute care, consultation services for physicians, staff, and patients, and tertiary care.

[Debate adjourned May 15: Ms Kryczka speaking]

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to continue with the debate on Motion 506. As I have only eight minutes, I will conclude by highlighting the issues, recommendations, and opportunities of Motion 506. The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross and others will be providing critical background on provincial palliative care programs and the wonderful vision being developed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight several issues. First, the cost of

palliative care to the patient is somewhat inconsistent across provincial regional health authorities. For example, daily accommodation costs in palliative care settings vary from region to region. The Capital health region charges \$13 per day for a palliative bed in a long-term care setting, while in another region, the CRHA for example, the daily accommodation fee for a hospice bed is \$25 and \$28.60 for a palliative bed in long-term care.

For palliative patients at home receiving support under the palliative care drug program, they must cover the cost of their own prescriptions to a maximum of \$25 per prescription. This can become very expensive. If a person is taking 13 different prescriptions, for example, the individual could be responsible for up to \$325 per month. For some this is much too expensive. For palliative care patients in acute care facilities all costs are fully covered, so the costs of staying at home, therefore, can be a disincentive for many terminally ill patients, who would rather stay in an acute care facility as everything is paid for. This discrepancy in costs creates excessive pressure on acute care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the second issue arises with funding going to the regional health authorities in one envelope. This means that the regional health authorities decide on their funding priorities. Some programs in smaller regions, however, may not get the amount of funding that a similar program receives in larger regions due to the size and population and the priorities of the regional health authorities. If regions want to increase funding to provide a fuller range of palliative care services, they will have to shift resources from other programs.

Palliative care was identified as a key priority in many of the regional health authorities' business plans for 2000-2001. If it is a key priority, are these regional authorities receiving adequate funding to provide quality palliative care in their region? Is this government emphasizing enough that end-of-life issues are truly important and that all regional health authorities should be pursuing the vision of a provincewide network for quality palliative care? My research indicates that many formal caregivers providing palliative care services in the smaller regions in particular have insufficient training and education about end-of-life care. The smaller regions find it difficult to give palliative care the focus needed as there is a lack of financial resources and trained specialists.

The third issue, Mr. Speaker, is that larger regional health authorities are better positioned to offer a full range of services, while the smaller ones have little chance of offering an equal level of service. The larger RHAs need provincial leadership, however, in their efforts to develop an effective regional support network with the smaller RHAs, ensuring that the proper level of palliative care services can be given throughout Alberta.

The fourth issue with palliative care is that the cost to the informal or family caregiver is immense both monetarily and spiritually. For the spouse or adult child providing care to a dying loved one, there is no legislated palliative leave or guarantee of job security or even of position or even of continuation of benefits during a work leave. This issue is one of national concern, which I have evidenced in my work with the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. The family caregiver also needs mental and spiritual support after losing a loved one, as there are understandable psychological implications that must be dealt with sooner rather than later.

Mr. Speaker, I have four recommendations on how we can improve end-of-life care in Alberta. The first is that there should be a philosophical debate on palliative care and very soon. I strongly believe that palliative care must be openly included in the debate on public health care. Everyone should become aware of the very successful network or support system that is developing in Alberta. We must discuss this issue because at some point every one of us

will require some degree of palliative care. Why do only 30 percent of Albertans know about palliative care? We must focus on the whole continuum of care from childbirth right through to end of life.

Secondly, I recommend that the government provide leadership in developing and implementing a provincewide system of standards of RHA accountability for palliative care with flexibility within individual regional health authorities. Currently there is collaboration between a number of regional health authorities to develop a network of palliative care across Alberta. Provincial government MLAs should be aware of the benefits and the roadblocks in the development of this provincial system in their constituencies in particular and should also support a government leadership role in this regard.

Third, in the vital area of education and research support this government needs to endorse the regional model developed by the Capital health authority and now the CRHA, and it should also collaborate with the federal government. For example, the federal government recently announced that a Calgary program has received \$250,000 in funding for Pallium, a continuing professional development initiative in palliative care. Pallium aims to improve the care of terminally ill patients in the prairie provinces and the Northwest Territories through a research partnership led by the University of Calgary with the universities of Manitoba and Alberta and regional health authorities centred in Yellowknife and Inuvik. Mr. Speaker, why not establish a provincial centre of distance education or a 24-hour assistance line?

My fourth recommendation is that as a government we must take action now. We have a window of only 10 years to prepare before the baby boomers start retiring in large numbers and demanding quality services, including palliative care. Also, new invasive cancer cases in the CRHA, for example, are expected to increase 41 percent by 2010.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with the hon. members two of the most important opportunities this motion would give the government of Alberta. By providing Albertans with a system of quality palliative care, whether in the home, community-based hospice, long-term care, or tertiary setting, more beds would be available in acute care facilities for other seriously ill patients. The best possible quality of life should be provided to the end of one's life in a comfortable, loving, and secure environment. However, a network of support must be there for terminally ill patients and their caregivers, whether professional, family, friends, or community volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, palliative care is a very important health service that is presently undervalued in our province. We will all benefit from future discussions on increased awareness and leadership action in support of a strong, provincewide palliative care network system. I strongly encourage all members to support this motion today.

I'd also like to extend a sincere thank you for co-operation to Pam Brown, who is program director of the regional palliative care program of the Calgary regional health authority; to Dr. Jose Pereira, medical director, tertiary palliative care unit, Foothills hospital, CRHA; and to Sharon Tell, senior operating officer, community care and public health, Capital health authority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to speak briefly to this motion around a corollary issue or perhaps an overriding issue with palliative care. That's the issue of dementia and Alzheimer's. Now, I know that as a result of the long-term care report and the impacts of aging report, the government has

been working on some different streams, following through on developing some of the recommendations that came out of those two reports. My concern and specific to what's being proposed here with a governmentwide strategy for palliative care and recognizing it as a core service is that I think exactly the same thing should be happening with dementia and Alzheimer's. For individuals over 85 years of age, 50 percent of them will have some form of dementia, which of course includes Alzheimer's. We don't seem to be recognizing that and integrating it into what we're doing.

3:40

I'm seeing the Alzheimer's strategy being developed as a health care strategy rather than a cross-departmental strategy, and when I look at what's being proposed here by the Member for Calgary-West under Motion 506, again, it's being developed as a health care strategy under the regional health authorities. My concern is that we need to be building more of a matrix structure when we're dealing with these issues.

You know, dementia affects more things than just the kind of care they're receiving through the health system. It affects things like housing. It affects things like transportation. It affects things like how our medical professionals are trained and what sort of spaces are available through the Department of Learning to move health care workers in. If we're saying that we need X number of health care workers specializing in dementia, do we have the spaces open in the universities to be able to receive these people?

When I actually start looking at this issue in the context of what's being proposed by the Member for Calgary-West, I'm actually, without trying too hard, looking at three different ministries here. We've got a Seniors ministry, a Health ministry, and a Learning ministry. Again, this is part of my concern here, because the member is proposing that it be cross-departmental, but it's still being housed in the regional health authorities. Maybe I'll just read the motion into the middle of my text here.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify palliative care as a core service in each regional health authority to ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services for end-of-life care with access to palliative community services . . . for physicians, staff, and patients, and tertiary care.

When we're looking at palliative care, especially obviously for seniors, we know right now that 50 percent or better of the people that we're dealing with will have some form of dementia. To my eye what's being proposed here by this member in Motion 506 has to be taken into context in a much wider cross-governmental stream of how we are planning to deal with and how we're allocating resources overall for dementia and Alzheimer's.

Some of the other issues around that are respite care and the standards of care, and I note that this is the same member who brought forward private member's Bill 203, which surprisingly to me was not supported by the majority of members in here. That bill was around establishing a committee that would develop standards of care. I was shocked that that wasn't supported by the House, because it's something that we so obviously need here. So once again she's looking at standards of care being incorporated into what she's proposing with this motion.

So I'm more than willing to support this motion, but given what I've seen go on already with the support for Bill 203, with the insistence that things like palliative care and dementia be dealt with solely as a stream falling under health care, I think we're going in the wrong direction here. I understand where the Member for Calgary-West is trying to go with this motion, but I think we have to take a step back and be much clearer in how we're putting in place these different streams of action resulting from the long-term care

report and the impacts on aging report, because we are going to create an awful lot of cracks in the system through which people can fall. There needs to be more of a matrix structure when we're dealing with a number of these different issues.

Finally, when I look at housing, I'm getting increasingly frustrated. Someone I met with recently brought up to me that the government spends twice as much on a child in care as we do on a senior in care. That's pretty chilling to me. I'm definitely not saying that less resources should be dedicated to children in care, but certainly we can and we need to be looking at committing more resources to seniors that are in care. I think that's a question of how much we value our seniors. There's a lot of talk, a lot of rhetoric, a lot of pretty pictures and pretty brochures about how much we value our seniors, but when I actually look at the programming, especially when I look at the programming that's being targeted in the future, I'm not seeing that value translated and manifested in what's being proposed.

There are a number of other programs that are possible here around early apprehension of Alzheimer's that I'm not seeing show up at all. Those programs should be in place long before anyone is needing the services of palliative care.

Part of what this person was bringing up with me – and I think it also relates to what's under Motion 506 – is that we must be dealing with the fee codes and how doctors are paid for the care that they're giving. I talked earlier about recruiting medical professionals and medical workers into the area of dementia and into the area of palliative care. It's darn hard for us to do that when we don't have a fee code that accepts and understands that more time needs to be spent with these patients. So that's another area to be looking for.

I just wanted to raise those points. I know that the member has lined up a number of her colleagues to speak in favour of her motion, so thank you for the opportunity to raise those points. I hope she will consider and integrate the issues that I've raised around Alzheimer's and dementia.

Thank you.

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

**MRS. FRITZ:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 506, proposed by my colleague from Calgary-West, is really quite powerful. I think it offers a catalyst for change in the way in which palliative care in our province serves the community but more importantly how that service is delivered.

I was honoured to be asked by my colleague from Calgary-West to speak to her motion. She's become known over her years as an MLA with incredible wisdom in regards to seniors' issues, which is one of the reasons why I believe we have this important motion before us today. My colleague's role as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council has shown all of us that a true reverence and compassion is essential when seniors are involved.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 highlights a topic that many either do not understand or are afraid to discuss, and that is because it relates to death and dying. Whether it is terminally ill children, AIDS patients, or the elderly, my colleague is attempting to bring understanding and change for those coping with their own fears or the deaths of their families, friends, and loved ones.

The essence of this motion is that palliative care become a core service for all of the RHAs in our province. As I was sitting in my backyard yesterday writing this speech, my husband and son asked what I was writing about, Mr. Speaker, and I said palliative care. Well, you can imagine my surprise when they both asked me: what is that? My explanation was simple. It is highly specialized care of a person whose illness no longer responds to treatment that is

designed to cure them. Palliative care is provided to people who are extremely ill and are making their transition from life to death. It is care that provides people at this stage in life with as much comfort and dignity as possible, and this is accomplished through a network of support which includes physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort.

3:50

Most often, Mr. Speaker, palliative care is administered through the comfort and warmth of the individual's own home with the assistance and support of family, friends, and community care agencies. The programs are flexible and can be altered to meet the unique care needs of each individual. In fact, as their symptoms change, a person can move from one palliative care setting to another. These compassionate services can be provided in the home, in a hospice setting, in a long-term care facility, or in the hospital as acute or tertiary care. As the patient moves toward more institutionalized settings, a greater percentage of the costs are covered by existing health care programs.

Mr. Speaker, I understand from my colleague from Calgary-West that 70 percent of seniors live in homes that they own, and the majority of seniors, even those over 85 years old, are expected to remain there. The ability to administer palliative care at home will enable more of our elderly to remain comfortable at this stage in their life. They will continue to receive the best and most complete care available surrounded by love and given respect, dignity, and affection.

Mr. Speaker, this important service significantly decreases the cost to our health care system. However, the cost to the individual and their family increases dramatically as more and more services are provided in the home. In fact, an ongoing problem with home-based palliative care is the significant time and monetary cost borne by the primary caregiver, who is often a family member. However, most family members do not complain because they know that by having their loved ones at home during life's last stages, they've said goodbye with love and are at peace.

The motion before us today by my colleague urges the government to identify this vital service as a core service in each regional health authority so that no Albertan is denied the best possible end-of-life care available. As stated, this motion will ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services. This includes access to community services such as palliative, home, and hospice care, as well as respite care.

Home health services refer to those health services which must be available or reasonably accessible to every person who needs them. "Available" means the service is provided within each region, and "accessible" means that if the service is not provided within a region, it will be available from another region or through a program that serves the entire province. Currently palliative care is defined as a core service by Alberta Health and Wellness. So that means, Mr. Speaker, that it's a core service that's defined by Alberta Health and Wellness. I think this is where it gets a bit confusing. At least when I was writing this speech and I was going through it, I thought that.

It's a core service through Alberta Health and Wellness, yet it's delivered through the RHAs to terminally ill patients and their families. Now, the RHAs are responsible for the decision-making within their region, but they still work within an overall provincial framework. The identification of core services is intended to ensure that all regions offer a similar mix of services to Albertans. Funding is provided to the RHAs in one envelope, and they are responsible for allocating the dollars to fund the various services provided in each region.

In general, core services encompass the complete range of services needed to protect and promote health, prevent illness and

injury, and provide diagnosis, treatment, care, and support. I think that this last point is particularly relevant: providing highly specialized care and support to the terminally ill is what palliative care does. Providing this service is a recognition that death is a part of life's natural cycle and that care and support to individuals and their loved ones is a fundamental health care service that our system should be providing at this important stage of life.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 seeks to increase the importance of palliative care to a level that is equal to that of other services provided by the regional health authority. Motion 506 encourages the government to standardize policies relating to palliative care within the local autonomy of each regional health authority. I think that's a very important point. As well, my colleague had made that one of her four recommendations which were put before the Assembly earlier. That will ensure that all Albertans are receiving adequate care options.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Victoria hospital and the St. Boniface hospital in Winnipeg opened the first palliative care units in Canada 27 years ago. They provided a new perspective on how people making their transition in life should be cared for. All of the provinces used the insight gained from these first palliative care units to develop their own and have continued to expand their method of delivery and resources.

In Alberta we have outstanding caregivers working in this critical area of medicine, and some were introduced to our Assembly today. You do magnificent work and thank you very much. To talk with them about the care of the dying is more than just informative. It is inspirational. These caregivers see the challenges of delivering the health care service that they believe to be essential within each RHA's jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, Sheila Weatherill, the president and CEO of Capital health, believes that the public is unaware of the first-class program that is available in the Capital region, and this is causing the program to perhaps to be under valued. In addition, Mrs. Weatherill has indicated that she believes we can develop provincial standards and still maintain local autonomy within the regional health authorities.

According to the Canadian Palliative Care Association, the Capital health model for palliative care is world-renowned for its excellence. Here in the capital a regional program was developed to integrate the services provided to those needing palliative care and allows easy access to different levels of care based on the severity of an individual's condition. These services are provided by a team of specially trained physicians and nurses who provide consulting services and support the region's primary care physicians and nurses in looking after the terminal ill.

Services are delivered both in the home and in continuing care settings. I understand that there is also an acute palliative care unit at the Grey Nuns community health centre which admits and cares for the terminally ill with severe physical and/or psychosocial distress. This continuum of care allows individual treatment by utilizing the services and care locations that are best for their personal circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, people in rural and urban communities require access to specialized palliative care services. Motion 506 will ensure that these services are available for all Albertans, regardless of where they live. We must encourage the creation of a provincial network for the delivery of palliative care services. Large regional health authorities have greater financial resources and as such are able to offer a full range of services that would not be practical in regions which do not have large populations. The building of a provincewide network for delivering palliative care services in Alberta I think should be encouraged for the benefit of everyone. Under such a network, patients from one region could easily access services available in another region.

To have even one family disadvantaged because they could not access appropriate palliative care would be a great tragedy. It is precisely during these difficult times that we need to ensure that proper care and treatment is available to everyone, regardless of where you live. We cannot allow people in any region to be denied full and comprehensive access to these essential and vitally important services. Compelling each RHA to recognize the importance of palliative care services will enable everyone to receive the critical care they need when they need it.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to identifying palliative care as a core service, education and training are required for primary caregivers, which include family physicians, local community nurses, and other community care providers. They are the first line of care and are compassionate, understanding, and humane when caring for those who are dying. In order to assist ill people and their families in making informed decisions, we need to provide the primary care providers with information about the programs and services that are available. Everyone will then be better able to meet the challenges that may arise.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 also attempts to raise public awareness of palliative care services already available in Alberta. It makes our end of life as important as the beginning of life. People need to become aware of the services that are available to them so they can make educated decisions about the care that they receive or their family members will receive. The more informed Albertans are, the more qualified they become to make difficult decisions relative to life's transition.

Mr. Speaker, we should also recognize that by bringing forward Motion 506, my colleague from Calgary-West is addressing the needs of an aging population and the services they are going to require, and she does this by making it a standardized service in each RHA. I understand from my colleague that by 2016 the percentage of seniors in Alberta will have increased from around 10 percent to nearly 15 percent of the provincial population. This means that the actual number of seniors will grow by 60 to 70 percent, which I believe requires the development of long-term strategies that allow the elderly to live the end of their lives in comfort, with dignity and with respect.

The service should be standardized because people requiring palliative care also live in all corners of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I believe that palliative care relates to all age groups, but understandably seniors are the largest population that the service is provided to. While approximately 60 percent of seniors live in Edmonton and Calgary, many smaller municipalities have higher proportions. Camrose is composed of approximately 20 percent seniors, and 16 percent of Drumheller residents are seniors. In addition, many villages and towns, including Mundare, Viking, and Two Hills, have senior populations in excess of 30 percent. You can see why, due to our aging population, we cannot afford to ignore the issue of palliative care.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-West for sponsoring this motion. You can see from the detail in the motion that was debated in the Assembly today that it has been well thought out and carefully researched by my colleague from Calgary-West. I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support Motion 506 and take another step towards the development of a viable palliative care system here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of this motion and commend the Member for Calgary-West for bringing it forward. It think it is very, very concise and deals precisely with the elements that need to be addressed. That is that palliative care should be a core service offered in every health region in the province, and it recognizes that this is simply a continuum of care, that the object of medical services is not always to save life. There comes a point when that is no longer possible, and then it is as important to provide compassionate care in appropriate settings for people who are beyond the reach of treatment.

I think, Mr. Speaker, this is a very progressive motion, and I'm pleased to support it. I don't intend to speak for more than a few seconds on it, but certainly I'm pleased to support it and am pleased to find that there are indeed some progressives amongst all those conservatives opposite.

Thank you.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and address the Assembly with regards to Motion 506. I would like to extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-West for bringing this important health care matter before us. Not only is it health care, but it deals with seniors as well. I think, having known the hon. Member for Calgary-West, that she certainly is taking note of what others in the Assembly are saying, and I'm sure she's very receptive to some of the remarks coming from the opposition as well.

I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, who has an extensive past history in nursing and dealing with seniors, talked about the need for this to happen not only today but in the future because as time goes on, the number of seniors in this province will increase and increase drastically. It is time today to start thinking ahead to what will happen when the baby boomers do reach that age when they will need some help, love, and understanding.

This motion aims to address the state of palliative care in the province of Alberta. What it essentially does is seek to achieve to urge the government to implement a standardized system of palliative care throughout Alberta.

Currently, palliative care is listed as a core health service here in our province, but unfortunately its status as a core service is just not enough to ensure that each Albertan has access to the same high standard of palliative care across this province. This motion would ask that the government recognize palliative care as an essential service to all, and we heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross talk about the lack of understanding. If you really want to understand the benefits of palliative care, talk to family members that have in fact utilized palliative care and some of the health professionals trained to administer and work with these people. They will attest to all of the good things that can happen when this is implemented in communities.

Albertans, regardless of where they live, want to see some of these services take place. I think that it is important to look firstly to the regional health authorities. They have now been going for some time and have worked over the last several years to implement new and different programs that utilize the professionals that are available to them and take into consideration the needs in their own area. So possibly the difference in what is needed in palliative care could be incorporated as well into their overall business plans.

The regional health authorities, as was stated just a few minutes ago, certainly are to be commended, and certainly one that I'm familiar with, as many of you in this room are, is the Capital regional health authority. Over a period of time they've been

recognized across Canada, if not throughout North America, for some of the very innovative programs which they have put together and are now implementing. One such program is palliative care, so I think that we don't need to reinvent the wheel. I don't think that we need to spend a great deal of time trying to figure what should be done. There are many, many examples, not only in Alberta but in other provinces as well, of things that would work and things that the community would embrace as well as the professionals delivering them.

Throughout our system of the regional health authorities we do see different levels of care that take place in many areas and pricing differences, as well, from region to region. We heard here a few minutes ago about some of the smaller communities today having 30 percent of their population as seniors. This over time is going to increase, and the needs are going to increase. So I think that it's prudent for us today to start looking at this in the long term.

One thing I do have to commend the Member for Calgary-West on. Time and time again, through her experience as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, she brings to this Assembly in the form of bills or motions some of her concerns and concerns of her constituents to do with seniors.

Now, one thing I'm very pleased with is that after the election the Premier did make some changes and has put in place a minister responsible for seniors. I think this is very, very important. Possibly as we move ahead, we can see things like palliative care being taken into consideration, not only on the health side of the issue but also on the seniors' side of the issue, so that possibly there can be palliative care delivered in any number of settings, whether that setting be a person's home, whether that setting be a seniors' complex, or whether that setting be a long-term care or an acute care hospital. Palliative care must be delivered in a caring and sensitive manner, and today there are many, many people, health professionals, that are trained exclusively to deal with seniors and dying as well as seniors' families and dying.

4:10

We spend a great deal of time, effort, and dollars looking at life from conception till end. Many, many dollars are spent even before a child is born, at the moment of conception, and I think it's very, very important to help people deal with their death, if not so much for the individuals themselves, because many are very, very sick, but their families, their loved ones, their spouses need some help.

One thing that I have found, coming from a smaller rural community, is that many, many organizations and associations, wonderful community groups and service groups like the Kinsmen Club, the Lions, the IODE, the Rotary, will oftentimes take some part of the health care facility, some piece of equipment or some room in the hospital, and raise dollars to furnish it and work very hard to bring the community together to fully understand and appreciate the need to do this.

One such area that I think many service groups would be willing to work towards and with in rural Alberta is palliative care, so I think we could look to our communities. I know our Rotary Club is to be very much commended in Lacombe. They spend considerable time on a weekly basis driving many, many seniors to appointments to make sure that they see their optometrist, that they see their dentist, that they see their doctor. Over a period of time they have furnished many, many rooms not only at the Lacombe community hospital but at the seniors' or nursing homes as well, and I know this is one more project that they might consider taking on to ensure that the entire community knows the importance of palliative care.

I think what the member is proposing here is to develop a seamless network for the delivery of palliative care across the

province. As a result of this network, there would be a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services available to address the needs of the persons who are at the end of their lives and their families. The motion would give palliative care the recognition it deserves. This is an essential health care service in this province, and it would ensure that the implementation of a comprehensive network would be examined by this government.

The goal of provincewide palliative care will be achieved based on the world-renowned model developed and implemented, as I said, right here in the Capital health authority, and I know Mrs. Weatherill and her people work together very closely. The board and members of her team would be more than willing to sit down with anyone and discuss what can happen with palliative care. I think Edmontonians can be very pleased that they have such an exceptional health authority and are receiving some of the best care in all of Canada. I think each and every one of us in this room can ask for some assistance from them in this regard.

Thank you.

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

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request unanimous consent of the House to deal with Motion 505 at this time.

[Unanimous consent denied]

### **Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped**

507. Mr. Cao moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that assured income for the severely handicapped recipients transferring to a nonexempt income such as the Canadian pension plan disability program retain medical benefits until similar income limits are reached that disqualify medical benefits to partially exempt income earners under the assured income for the severely handicapped program.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to rise and introduce Motion 507 to the Assembly today. This motion concerns a pressing matter, because the assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, recipients who receive nonexempt funding from other sources exceeding \$855 are automatically removed from the AISH assistance and therefore lose the medical benefits that AISH provides to them. This is especially disheartening because people on AISH are the Albertans who are most in need of our assistance, and when we take away their medical benefits because they have received more than \$855 from other sources, we take away one of the most integral forms of help that we can provide to them.

Before discussing the details of the motion, I'd like to take a moment to clearly outline the difference between exempt, partially exempt, and nonexempt funding under the AISH framework. Exempt funding is any funding coming from outside of AISH that a recipient can earn without having deductions taken from his AISH

benefits. Some examples of exempt funding include GST rebates, child allowances, and CPP death benefits, as well as others.

Partially exempt funding is the money that an AISH recipient can earn and that is not deducted dollar for dollar from his or her AISH payments. There are many forms of partially exempt funding. For example, dividend income is partially exempt as is net employment income after all statutory government deductions are taken. Partially exempt earnings are usually derived from employment. The first \$200 of earned wages cause no reduction in AISH income benefits, and then 75 cents for every dollar earned thereafter is deducted.

Talking about the nonexempt income, these incomes are those which are deducted dollar for dollar from the AISH payments. I will discuss the many forms of nonexempt income later in the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I have introduced this motion out of a concern raised by one of my constituents. This person approached me and told me that his AISH medical benefits were taken away from him when he was granted Canada pension plan disability funding that exceeded \$855 per month. Without the medical coverage that accompanied his AISH funding, he had to use his CPP funding, which amounted to \$860, merely \$5 more than the AISH limit, to fund his living expenses and his medical expenses. Clearly, he would have been better off without the extra \$5 but with the medical coverage. I do not see why we could not have given this person medical benefits to go along with his CPP disability funding. He's a disadvantaged person who is in need of government assistance to maintain a quality standard of living and is a person with medical needs that far exceed those of average Albertans. The system did not work for him. We can make this work for him if we pledge today to ensure that the AISH recipients who receive above \$855 in nonexempt funding are allowed to retain their medical coverage.

4:20

My constituent is not the only person to find himself in this situation. The list of nonexempt income sources is wide and includes Canada pension plan disability payments, workers' compensation, employment insurance, pension and retirement income, payments from Veterans Affairs, mineral royalties, land claim settlements, support payments from a sponsor for sponsored immigrants, spousal support from a former spouse, or inheritance income. While this is not an exhaustive list, it is clear that many of these sorts of payments do not come with medical benefits, and this means that many more Albertans are likely facing similar problems as those of my constituent. If any of these nonexempt income sources provide AISH recipients with more than \$855, they lose their AISH money. I can understand that. However, they would lose their AISH medical benefit too. That I cannot understand.

Alberta has always made sure that we take care of our vulnerable citizens. Through our various legislation and regulations we ensure that those who face extraordinary health challenges are given every opportunity to live quality lives. We ensure the safe care of our elderly, stringent health regulations in our hospitals, and efficient provision of health services throughout the health care system. The needs of Albertans are not ignored by this government. Rather, we have made giant strides in guaranteeing that our health and social care systems are the best in Canada.

AISH is another of these generous programs. AISH ensures that support is there for those who need it most. The Alberta government is committed to supporting and improving the lives of citizens with disabilities through AISH and other targeted programs. AISH is one of the best and most generous programs of its kind in Canada and supports more than 25,000 Albertans who are in need of assistance. This number is expected to grow to over 30,000 over the next three years.

People who receive AISH are those with severe disabilities that inhibit their ability to earn a living. These disabilities that they have are permanent, and there's nothing that can change their physical condition. People receiving AISH already find themselves at the lower end of the economic spectrum before being granted government assistance. AISH is therefore an essential part of their ability to take care of themselves and in many cases their families.

These are Albertans who with little assistance are able to live productive lives. They have by nature or by accident been dealt a different hand than the rest of us. The assistance that AISH provides, both monetary and medical, helps them with many things that we take for granted. By providing these Albertans with assistance, we afford them the firm footing required to live with dignity and respect. AISH medical coverage provides recipients with coverage for necessary services like ambulance care, drug coverage, psychological counseling and treatment, and home nursing. However, unexpected loopholes always pop up. For example, consider one concerning my constituent.

Now, I would not ordinarily have known that such a loophole existed, but when I am faced with a constituent who has fallen through the cracks, I feel it is my duty to work on his behalf to make sure that neither he nor anyone else in a similar position falls through that loophole again. In the larger picture this is the duty of everyone in this Assembly. The best way to make sure that the health of my constituent and the health of others is adequately safeguarded is to stitch up the loophole with the thread of sound legislation. I urge the government to create this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, before I continue today, I would like to note that I do see an upper limit. For example, a single person who receives partially exempt funding outside of AISH can receive up to \$1,340 monthly before they are ineligible for AISH monetary funding. For every dependent child an AISH recipient can add \$400 to this upper limit. For example, an AISH recipient with two children can earn \$2,140 per month before he or she loses all AISH monetary funding. Further, a single AISH recipient can earn just over \$20,900 annually in partially exempt funding before his or her medical benefits are discontinued. For every child after the first child that is dependent upon an AISH recipient, \$2,000 is added to his annual limit.

I propose that while keeping an amount of income needed to become ineligible for an AISH payment of \$855 per month, we allow all persons eligible for AISH benefits, even those who receive funding from nonexempt sources, to continue receiving the medical coverage until they reach the upper threshold as prescribed by rules governing the partially exempt income. By doing this, we will ensure that the person eligible for AISH will not only be able to take care of their day-to-day expenses but will also continue to receive medical coverage.

What is at stake here is fairness. At \$855 per month AISH provides severely handicapped persons with \$10,200 per annum. If a severely handicapped person receiving money from nonexempt sources earns any more than that amount, he or she becomes ineligible for AISH income and medical benefits as well. This hardly seems fair when someone with similar problems but with different sources of income can earn up to \$20,900 before their medical benefits are discontinued. Why would we drastically disadvantage one group?

Mr. Speaker, it should not matter where the funding comes from. It should only matter that all persons who need AISH medical care are able to get it. The medical benefits that these persons are entitled to should be theirs until they reach the higher income level, such as the \$20,900 threshold, regardless of how they get that money. Also, we would make the care of the severely handicapped in Alberta more fair by equalizing the medical benefits received by AISH and by CPP disability recipients.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I regret that it's necessary to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, but the time limit for the consideration of this item of business on this day has concluded.

4:30

## head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

### **Bill 15**

#### **Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001**

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

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

What a great pleasure it is for a new MLA to speak to a bill that will have such a significant, positive effect on so many Albertans. What rookie politician anywhere wouldn't want to introduce a bill that lowers the tax rate, increases tax deductions, and puts more money in peoples' pockets?

There are three significant parts to this bill. I'd like to speak to each part. The first part is the reduction of the Alberta single rate of tax from 10 and a half to 10 percent. This change reduces income tax for all taxable Albertans. The biggest winners are the 200,000 low-income Albertans who are completely removed from the provincial income tax rolls.

This bill increases the value of tax credits. The tax credits benefit specific Albertans. Several credits are increased to match federal increases; others are adjusted for inflation in a very simple manner. Some examples. For the in-home care of a relative the credit goes from \$2,386 to \$3,500. The full-time education tax credit doubles from \$200 a month to \$400 a month. The age credit goes from \$3,531 to \$3,619. This change indexes this credit to the rate of inflation as per the CPI.

Albertans at every income level will pay less tax than they did in 2000. In Alberta single-income families will be treated fairly. The spousal amounts will match the basic personal amounts, and their income will no longer be pushed into a higher bracket. The province will not punish these families for making the decision to have one parent stay at home with their children. Minimum wage earners working up to 2,300 hours per year will be treated fairly as they will not pay any provincial income tax. Single parents will benefit from the significant enhancement made to the equivalent-to-spouse credit. This credit was more than doubled. Two-income families will pay less tax. Families with two children who earn less than \$33,500 will pay no provincial income tax after the Alberta family employment tax credit is taken into account. Seniors will benefit from the large enhancements to the basic and spousal credit amounts. In addition, Alberta will index both the age and pension income credits, protecting seniors against bracket creep.

The second change to this act, Mr. Speaker, is a reduction in the fuel tax on locomotive fuel. It reduces this fuel tax from 3 cents a litre to 1 and a half cents a litre. This reduction in railway fuel tax will ensure that Alberta farmers, resource exporters, and other businesses have access to low-cost, high-quality rail transportation services.

The third part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is intended to maintain the same tax collection abilities for the Crown that have been in place for many years. Exempting the Crown from the Limitations Act for the purpose of tax collection will ensure the Crown's established abilities to collect taxes within Alberta remain whole.

Now, I shouldn't have to urge members of the Assembly on both

sides to support a bill that lowers taxes. Needless to say, it's a great step forward for the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to speak to Bill 15, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001. There are a number of issues that are raised by this. Certainly Alberta Liberals are always willing to support a bill that reduces the tax burden on Alberta families, but this bill is again raising the issue of whether or not a flat tax is a fair tax for Albertans.

I spoke strongly against the previous incarnations of this, that it was really shifting the tax burden onto the shoulders of the middle-income earners in Alberta. I don't feel that it is a fair tax system when we have reductions in the double digits for the high-income earner elite and a significantly less percentage of reduction for middle-income earners.

I think the plan that was proposed by the Alberta Liberals around a fairer tax system in fact would have given greater savings and would've been much more fair. What we were looking at was a 0, 10, 12 plan that would give all Albertans a significant tax cut. It was a zero percent rate for income earned to \$13,569, a 10 percent rate for between that amount and \$79,999, and a 12 percent rate for every dollar of income earned above \$79,999, so \$80,000 for all intents and purposes.

We were looking to increase the personal tax exemption from \$7,231 to \$13,569, and we were also looking to increase the spousal and equivalent-to-spouse exemption from where it was to \$13,569 so that families with stay-at-home spouses are treated the same as families with two incomes from outside of the home. I still believe the 0, 10, 12 tax plan provides a more fair and sustained tax relief for all Albertans.

One of the questions that came to me as I quickly looked over this bill is: why is the government introducing legislation that would cut railway fuel tax in half when in fact this was a recommendation that was brought forward and was rejected by the Business Tax Review Committee? What's happened between when that idea was rejected by the Business Tax Review Committee and now, when we see it coming forward ensconced in Bill 15? Has there been some lightbulb go on somewhere, some lobbyist that's not registered that we're unaware of? What's happened here? Well, tell me: what was the change? We had it rejected previously; now it's in legislation. So what allows for that change? The member sponsoring the bill spoke very briefly, and perhaps he can arrange for one of his colleagues to stand up and explain that as part of the debate as we go along.

There are some good things in this bill, as I've said. It is reducing the tax burden, although we think there is a better way to do that. It is also working with the tax credit increases provided for people that are providing home care for relatives. We've spoken about this issue in a lot of other contexts where people are giving up their time and their earning ability to care for relatives in their homes. There needs to be some recognition of that. Indeed, it is one of the tax credit increases that is in this bill. That would also capture people that are providing care for children with physical and mental infirmities.

There's also an increase in the education credits, although I still believe the best way to deal with encouraging people to participate in postsecondary education is to work to lower the tuition fees all the way around. The education credits may not be the incentive that we're looking for if we really wish to follow through on that, but I'd rather have them than not have them.

An increase in the amount that is deductible for persons that are

over 65. Now, as the Official Opposition critic on seniors' issues, my colleagues in this Assembly have heard me get up on a number of occasions and talk about how seniors are really feeling that their sweat-soaked loonies are being pried out of their pockets with alarming frequency, especially with the increase around user fees and also the continued insistence from the government on having seniors pay for health care premiums and their Blue Cross coverage. So this increase in the amount deductible for seniors is welcome. There's still much more that the province could be doing that would be even more helpful.

4:40

Now, when we start looking at more specifics of what's being offered in this, we see that it's amending the Alberta Corporate Tax Act by stating that "the Limitations Act does not apply to the Crown with respect to any matter arising under this Act." So, in other words, when it is found that a business owes the government corporate taxes, there's no limitations on when the Crown can bring this claim forward. A good thing, say I. I think that's perfectly appropriate because when we're all contributing, both individuals and corporations, to the revenue base in the province, I'm always seeking equity and fairness.

Certainly the government has proven to be most vigilant in pursuing recovery of moneys for the government from individuals. For example, with a SFI overpayment or an educational grant overpayment they're voracious in the intensity with which they pursue individuals to vacuum that money back out of their bank account. I think it is perfectly appropriate that that should apply to industry as well, and certainly I'm glad to see that there are no limitations on when the government can be pursuing owed corporate taxes from businesses.

The act is also covering individuals by saying that "the Limitations Act does not apply to the Crown with respect to any matter arising under the Act." In other words, when someone owes the government taxes, there's no limitation as to when they can bring that forward. So that's capturing the individual. In the earlier section we're dealing with being able to pursue corporate tax, and there's another section that's able to pursue individuals.

Now, the big one that everyone is most familiar with is decreasing the flat tax from 10.5 percent to 10 percent. This is the second reduction that we've had of this flat tax rate. I remember when it was brought in with much ballyhoo – streamers, champagne corks a-poppin' on the other side – at 11 percent. Then the federal government brought down their budget. And, oh, my goodness, that all of a sudden put the Alberta flat tax in a very poor light because in fact those on the lowest end of the spectrum would have been paying more.

I think what it did in having the federal tax lower is that it really pointed out that that flat tax acts almost as a wringer. It torques, and those on the higher and lower end of the tax spectrum – it's like wringing a dish rag. You know, the part that gets rung the most intensely and where the water flies off is the two ends. So when you have the federal tax lowering and when we looked at the Alberta flat tax, those who would have been paying significantly more were the very low-income earners, and those who would have been saving significantly more, would have been taking home more were the high-income earners, the very wealthy elite.

Nothing pointed that out more clearly than having the federal government come down with their budget so very quickly. If my memory serves me, I think that even before this act was originally brought forward, they had to change from 11 percent to 10 and a half. We've now had another federal budget, and what do I see when I look at Bill 15? Well, indeed, we are now going down to

10 percent. So this is not through any sort of magnanimous gesture on behalf of the government. I believe it's because the federal program in fact points up how inequitable this Alberta program is and how it does torque on both ends of the income spectrum. They are now having to reduce it to 10 percent.

We've got a number of other sections that are dealing with the in-home care of relative credits, which I've already spoken about, plus the tax credits for those who are taking care of children with infirmities that have to be cared for in their homes, the section increasing the amount for people over 65.

Then we do have one section that is dealing with a very slight change in the formula for calculating medical expense credits. Combined with that is an increase in the tax credit for people suffering from a prolonged mental or physical impairment which is restricting their daily activities.

We have the education tax credit, as I spoke of. Now, there is a section in here that's really interesting. The government is changing what students can do with their unused tuition and education credit if they made no income to deduct against the credits. Well, a nice idea. Glad to see it. But I don't know how many people this is really going to be helping out, because every student that I've run into – I have a lot of students living in Edmonton-Centre, and my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview certainly has the university in his constituency and a lot of people living in that area. I don't think either one of us has met a student that isn't working at least one job.

Certainly many of the students I've had through my office are working three jobs just to keep up, and they're having to extend the amount of time that they're in fact in university. So if it was a three-year degree they were going for, they're now doing a three-year degree over four years, and they're still working three jobs, most of them a combination of part-time and full-time jobs and, obviously, most of them in the service sector, where they're not being paid a lot of money.

So a nice idea, but I don't know how many students are able to go through postsecondary education in this day and age and not hold down some kind of job where they are having some kind of earnings. This is only going to apply to students that have no income to deduct against the credits.

There is an amendment that deals with a calculation, also for tuition and education tax, that can be transferred to another person.

I notice that there's also a change in the overseas employment tax credit. For those people who earn overseas income, they currently get to deduct 40 percent of that amount that the individual is deducting under section 122.3 of the federal act for the taxation year. This is being reduced to 35 percent, so this actually increases the income tax payable because the tax credit has in fact shrunk by 5 percent. I know that for some of our oil field workers and those that have experience in that area that get snapped up by a company, sometimes Canadian companies that are operating overseas, this is certainly important to them because they often feel that they're getting fairly severely taxed.

There's a possibility here of a section that might be increasing the deduction for business income in Alberta. It's allowing a person to use their pension credits, unused tuition and education tax credits, the transferred credits, deductions for taxable dividends, overseas employment tax credit, foreign tax credit, political contributions, and royalty tax credits in calculations for determining their allowed deductions from business income in Alberta. So we'll see what the effect of that one is. It's allowing them to add up everything in their personal life, basically, and then look to see whether it could also apply on their business income.

I know that one of my colleagues had also wanted to speak to this

bill. Again, as I said when I started, the Liberals are not going to have any objection to the lowering of taxes. It certainly does follow through on the government's earlier promise.

I still find that railway tax credit odd, and I'm looking forward to hearing from the sponsor of the bill or someone else who can explain why there was a change in direction there or whether the Business Tax Review Committee was discredited in some way. There must be a good story behind all of that. I'd love to hear it. [interjection] Oh, good. It sounds like the Minister of Energy might be looking to speak. I'm looking forward to that. Maybe he'll be able to answer some of the questions that I've raised instead of just commenting from the sidelines.

4:50

As I was saying, I'm really pleased to see . . . [interjection] Oh, there's another minister going to get involved. We're getting lots of people engaged on this really important and exciting bill today, Mr. Speaker.

I think the provisions that have been put in dealing with the Limitations Act and being able to pursue people for both back corporate and back individual taxes is a good one. I'm glad to see that that's been put in there.

So those are the issues that I really wanted to raise and the questions that I wanted to raise in the context of debate in second reading on this bill. As I say, in principle I'm certainly willing to support it, but I look forward to the other issues that are raised during debate and to what the answers to the questions are that I have brought forward.

Thanks very much for the opportunity.

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

**MR. MacDONALD:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a few brief comments at this time on Bill 15. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti discuss the merits of this legislation this afternoon, and I listened particularly with interest to the discussion since, the discussion by the Member for Edmonton-Centre regarding the locomotive fuel reduction. If it's good for the locomotives, I would like to bring to the attention of the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti in particular that if I was to go to Grande Prairie, I could stand on a street corner and not five minutes would go by and there would be at least one pickup truck come along with at least a 200-litre propane tank in the back.

Unfortunately, there's a 6.5 cent a litre propane tax levied in this province. Last year – I looked it up – we received \$14 million in revenue from that tax. This year, according to government projections, there's going to be a \$9 million sum realized from taxes on propane at the retail pump. Now, that's a reduction of \$5 million in government revenue. I look at Ontario. Ontario has a 4 and a half cent a litre tax on propane at the retail level. Quebec eliminated theirs.

Now, I think of the revenue that's lost because of this tax. People are not getting conversions anymore because there's no cost saving here. This is an environmentally sound fuel, and I would urge at some point in the future – perhaps it's a little bit too late for me to amend this legislation at this time – all members of this Assembly to consider it. I'm not talking about having a lobbying effort on the Minister of Finance, but certainly if government members, for instance, were to go to Wainwright on a caucus retreat, it's something they could all discuss together.

This is a tax. If it was eliminated, I think it would increase the consumption of propane as a fuel in this province for delivery trucks,

for farm trucks. I think it is a sound thing to do. You look at other provinces and what they have done and the fact that members of this Assembly are very fond of comparing the tax regime here to the tax regime in Ontario. Well, in Ontario currently there are 2 cents a litre less tax on propane. Also, considering the fact that so much of the production of the western Canada sedimentary basin is from Grande Prairie and north right to the border, all this propane has been shipped from here to Toronto and to Ontario. I believe the latest figures I had were that there was a 17 cent a litre price reduction in Ontario. I don't know what it is in Grande Prairie, but I know what it is in Edmonton.

I would urge members of this Assembly to consider in the future eliminating the propane tax as a fuel tax. I think it is a good idea. Can we survive without the \$9 million in revenue in the budget of this province? I think we can. We can start with things like the risk management fund. There was money spent on that. We can ensure that that's not done again. That's almost 10 percent of the savings right there. There are ways to save money, and I'm sure we can get along without this.

In closing, I would like to remind members of the cost of the conversion to propane and the cost of the tanks. If this 6.5 cent a litre tax on propane were eliminated, it would demonstrate to the consumers, the motoring public of this province who want to choose propane as a fuel, that the government is serious, that this is a fuel not only for now but also for the future.

At this time, I would like to thank all hon. members for listening to my pitch to eliminate the 6.5 cent a litre tax on propane. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to close debate.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is committed to maintaining the most competitive overall tax regime in Canada. We believe that a simple, low, and fair tax system is the most competitive. Lowering the single rate of income tax from 10 and a half to 10 percent is proof of that commitment. Alberta has one low rate of 1 and a half cents per litre for all aviation fuel, and now the same low rate will apply to railway fuel. It's just another example of this government's commitment to lowering taxes.

With that, I'll conclude. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

### Bill 11

#### Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 15: Ms Blakeman]

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm anxious to participate this afternoon in the debate on Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act. This is certainly a long time in coming. You know, I've heard many politicians across this province, some of whom are in this Assembly, discuss family values, and finally I can see that the family is being put first with this legislation.

To support this bill is quite easy, because it is good legislation. When it comes, again, to supporting this, you have to consider the families, the young families of this province and the parents. This legislation gives legislative force to maternity and parental leave regulations passed in February, and later on perhaps I'll talk a little

bit about that. It also gives entitlement to up to one year of unpaid job-protected employment leave to care for a newborn baby or an adopted child. Unlike federal and other provincial legislation distinction is made between fathers and adoptive parents, who are entitled to 37 weeks. Adoptive parent groups, as I understand it, are opposed to policies that differentiate them from other parents, and that is understandable. I don't feel that there should be any difference between birth parents and adoptive parents.

5:00

Now, in February of last year the federal government doubled the duration of maternity and parental leave under the EI or employment insurance program to 50 weeks, and that was effective, of course, after Christmas, in January of this year. This gave parents the opportunity to spend more time with their newborn and newly adopted children. Again, that goes back to family values. I'm not going to go into any detail on this whole concept of family values and how on occasion there's just lip service, in my view, paid to it, but again this is a positive step.

I can remember getting a call about three years ago at the constituency office from a mother in Calgary. She was a professional. She had moved to Calgary and had taken a job and had to have maternity leave. She phoned in utter disgust at the law in this province and how she felt it was inadequate. I understand the persistence that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort has provided on this issue. Perhaps that member also received a phone call from that particular individual, because she made her points very well and for my benefit compared our leave schedule here with other provinces. It got to the point in the discussion where she said that if she had realized this, she probably would not have taken the corporate transfer to Calgary. That was amazing in my view, because we have to ensure that there is an attraction to workers to this province.

Now, while the federal government decides how long EI is paid out for maternity or parental leaves, the federal government can only compel employers governed by the Canada Labour Code. This is why this legislation is so important to Alberta parents now. Why have we waited so long? Who knows? At least it's come forward. It may not be letter perfect, but it is certainly a big step in the right direction.

Several provinces passed legislation matching or exceeding the federal extension. In fact, the province of Quebec, as I understand it, offers 60 weeks. Although the provinces had plenty of notice and while the federal legislation took effect, as I said, after Christmas this year, Saskatchewan and Alberta were the only holdouts. Previously, as discussed in the phone conversation I had with the professional person from Calgary, Alberta law had protected jobs for only 18 weeks.

Now, it appears that the government has finally listened to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, and this extension on parental leave is going to improve all workplace relations in this province. Small businesses certainly had reservations about this, but I think that when you think of satisfied and content employees, I'm sure it's going on.

Both private- and public-sector corporations in this province are on recruitment drives. For instance, if whatever regional health authority is to go on a recruitment drive for registered nurses, the registered nurses, Mr. Speaker, the majority of whom are female, that may be a question they would ask a recruiter: how many weeks of maternity benefit leave could I expect in your province? It may be easier as a result of this legislation for the recruiters to attract not only registered nurses but professionals of all sorts. Perhaps the civil service in the province is going to be on a major recruitment drive.

When we think of extending leave provisions to the federal

standard, I believe it also can benefit small businesses. A company that has to hire and train someone to replace an employee on maternity leave for 18 weeks any way – that was to be the length of time. So why not 50 weeks? It might actually be easier to recruit someone to a job, and perhaps if the economy continues and unemployment rates stay as low as they are, well, that person after that leave can find themselves in an advantageous position and find employment in the corporation, in maybe that department or some other department, because as the economy continues to expand, it might be easier to recruit someone to a job.

This is a bill I think that is generally supported by the majority of Albertans. I can't understand why people would have difficulty supporting this, but an additional argument in favour of the 50-week extension is that parents will be able to work part-time while receiving benefits. Now, if that is to happen, it will help businesses whose specific needs are difficult to fulfill. You know, there are niche careers, or there may be difficulty in recruiting someone full-time. Well, that will help out.

But when we think of job experience and the demands of the workplace and the demands of the workplace on family, we need to understand that parents who are better able to balance the demands of work and family experience less stress. There is a lower rate of absenteeism from the job, therefore more productive workers. Alberta is noted for the productivity of its workforce. A recent Canada Health study estimated that 19.8 million workdays at a cost of \$2.7 billion, Mr. Speaker, per year were lost in 1997 due to work/family conflict and stress.

This bill as it was introduced by the minister was turning regulation into legislation. It was the final step, it states here, in protecting the rights of working parents and employers.

Now, the consultation process with this went on for some time. There were employees, employers, working parents. Maternity and parental leave provisions had to strike the right balance between providing parents with the flexibility they need to care for their young families and ensuring employers have adequate time to make good hiring decisions. Well, I think all of that has been done with this bill.

Under the Employment Standards Amendment Act, Mr. Speaker, mothers and dads and adoptive parents are entitled to 37 weeks of parental leave, and birth mothers will also be eligible for 15 weeks of maternity leave. The leaves are available to parents of children born or adopted after December 31, 2000.

5:10

Now, why did we wait so long in this province? Many people have brought this to the attention of the Assembly, but we waited and we waited and we waited in this province. The only thing I can say is that it is well worth the wait, I suppose, but I'm a little disappointed at the speed, but there is very little that can be done about that. We can talk about family values, and we do talk about family values, but when you look at some of the cautions that one has to consider when debating this bill – it's a rubber stamp. It's a whitewash, because we had the regulations. They were announced in February, and they were announced in conjunction with the election, and now we wait for the legislation. One can only bring those concerns forward to politely remind all members of this Assembly just exactly the importance that should be put on legislation. Regulations should come a distant, distant second.

In closing I would like to remind the minister that there is more work to be done on the Employment Standards Code. This is one amendment, but I look forward in the future to amendments to change the Employment Standards Code so that there is rigorous enforcement of all Employment Standards Code rules and regula-

tions, because unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it is anywhere between 75 percent and 82 percent of Albertans who rely on the Employment Standards Code to govern all the workplace rules and regulations, and there have been just some dismal failures in enforcing one of the most important statutes. All statutes in this province are important. I'm not saying that. But when you consider the size of the workforce that relies on the governance or by the commitment of this government to enforce this law, whether you're working for an oil company in downtown Calgary and you're applying for maternity benefits or if you're working for a car wash in downtown Calgary and you're not getting the hours on your paycheque that you worked for, it should be of concern to the government.

Now, the current minister has taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, with enforcement of the occupational health and safety rules and regulations, and I expect to see the current minister do the same with the Employment Standards Code. I'm looking forward in the future, Mr. Speaker, to other amendments to this legislation to make the minister's job much easier, because when you think of someone who is earning \$6 an hour, they should be entitled to every cent that they earn. Earlier in the Assembly we heard that low-income Albertans – and many of those are earning \$6 an hour and \$6.50 an hour – are going to be experiencing total tax relief, I think was the description used, provincial tax relief. If individuals are working for that, they're entitled to every penny, and they're not getting it.

There are other examples besides the car wash industry. There's the hospitality industry. You have young people entering the workforce, some of whom are entering the workforce for the first time, and they are being exploited. One thing we are doing by not enforcing the law is that we are building a confrontational relationship, and I am strongly opposed to a confrontational relationship between employer and employee. If you go into the workforce for the first time and you've got to fight like a badger, if you've got to go to the employment standards office to get what's rightfully yours, the wages that you worked so hard for, you're going to have a suspicion towards all employers in the future because you just can't rely on them.

You know yourself that if you've punched the clock or whatever – your time was taken – and you're going in to work for three hours in a restaurant but suddenly the restaurant is not willing to pay you your time because there are no customers, that's wrong. The restaurant should have the management skill to be able to put you to work in another productive capacity. I can't believe that in this province we tolerate that sort of activity.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, is if one restaurant, for instance on one end of the street, is abiding by the Employment Standards Code and another restaurant, a competitor down the street, is not abiding by the code. Each of them have, say, a range of between 15 to 20 either part-time or full-time employees. How can the restaurant which is abiding by the rules – paying the wages, paying vacation pay, holiday pay, overtime pay, all those rules in the Employment Standards Code – compete on a level playing field with another enterprise of a similar size and in the same market up the street who is not abiding by the rules and is ripping off the employees? It is unacceptable that we allow this to happen.

I look forward – I'm sure it's coming – to further amendments to the Employment Standards Code to deal with this issue of chronic repeat offenders of the Employment Standards Code in this province. Whether it's in the hospitality industry, whether it's in the car wash industry, whether it's in the construction industry, or whether it's in the dry cleaning industry, it is very, very important that the hon. minister take a look at this. I look forward to these amendments as they come before the Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is well known for its focus on people, prosperity, and preservation. I'm very happy to commend the Minister of Human Resources and Employment for bringing Bill 11 forward, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001. I'm very pleased to join the debate on the bill as it relates to my focus on people, the human factor of our Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency work I have encountered many cases of hardworking parents who need parental leave. For instance, in the case of a young, hardworking family after the birth of their first child, the mother and the baby were not in good health, and the father could not take leave from work to care for them. In order to do so, he had to quit his job, and having quit the job, employment insurance would not cover their income.

In another situation, Mr. Speaker, a young mother had to stay home longer than the minimum employment standards, at that time 18 weeks, to take care of her infant. She had to quit the job and lost all seniority benefits with the company.

In yet another situation a working couple wanted to build a family through adoption. They had to wait a long, long time for the child. The adoption process exhausted their very limited financial resources and all their time for leaves long before the child arrived. So once the child arrived in their family, they did not have leave time left to familiarize with and to take care of the newly adopted member of the family.

5:20

Visiting a few child care facilities, Mr. Speaker, regardless of their superb services, I saw very young infants lying lonely in their cribs without warm, motherly care. I also know that there are many new parents who are in distress because of demands at work and the natural parental feelings for their infants.

As the chair of the Employment Standards Regulation Review Committee in 1999 I discovered that the minimum parenting leave in Alberta was at that time the lowest of all Canadian jurisdictions. So in the year 2000 these were my motives in designing my private member's Bill 209, proposing a change in maternity, adoption, and parental leaves. I approached the situation not from the point of view of benefits for the mother or the father or the employer. I considered the issue from the perspective of a newborn Albertan, of a very recently adopted child. From the perspective of that infant the very best thing possible is, without doubt, to spend as much time as possible with a loving and nurturing parent. Once sitting in the Chamber during the debate of my private member's bill, I had the thought that if all members were magically turned back to our infancy time, all those babies would have voted for their parents to stay with them.

I believe that all Albertans take pride in caring for our children and all good businesses take pride in caring for their staff. After all, what are business successes for if not for our family and our children?

As the fall session in the year 2000 came to a close, my private member's bill was stalled, but I was very, very pleased that the Minister of Human Resources and Employment announced on

December 18, 2000, that a committee would be established to study the issues and report its findings by January 31, 2001. The committee included Sue Evison, a professional engineer, the president of APEGGA, a consulting engineer, and a working mother with two teenagers. Joining her on the committee were members Corinne Pohlman, senior policy analyst, Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Co Vanderlaan, director, Christian Labour Association of Canada; Shannon Wyatt, a lawyer returning to work after maternity leave; Audrey Cormack, president, Alberta Federation of Labour; and the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, currently the Minister of Gaming. To those who have helped and participated in the subject matter, my sincere thanks.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 does everything and more than I proposed in my private member's bill last year. First, with the recent extension of the federal employment insurance to pay for parental leave for the entire year, it allows parents to enjoy the EI entitlement while doing the hard and dutiful work of parenting. Secondly, the bill allows parents the freedom to determine which one of them will stay home with the child and for how long. Thirdly, the bill extends its new parental leave provision to adoptive parents as well, giving them the same rights as other new parents, other new mothers and fathers. Adoption should be encouraged to meet their needs and to help those unwanted children or the children in government care.

I feel the potential benefits of the bill are clear. Study after study shows that the early relationship between parent and child is one of the most critical factors in determining the future health and happiness and success of a child. Parenting leave's impact on Alberta's tremendous prosperity is likely to be minimal, and the potential impact on the future of our children is so great.

Before concluding I commend the Minister of Human Resources and Employment for taking this initiative forward. I also want to thank the staff of Alberta employment standards for working hard behind the scenes to bring ideas for changes to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that Bill 11 will codify the maternity and parental leaves in law, not just in regulations. I urge all member colleagues to give the bill your full support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now adjourn and reconvene at 8 p.m., at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Passed.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

