

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 29, 2001**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 01/11/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure and honour that I rise to introduce two very special ladies in the Assembly today. The first one is someone who could see great potential in a skinny, 155-pound gas jockey at Exxon. She had enough confidence to become the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne's sweetheart, later wife of 26 years and mother to two children. The name of this valiant person is Liz VanderBurg.

The second lady that I would like to introduce today to the Assembly is also a woman who has proven that she can go the distance, that she is also valiant. She has been married for 36 years. She's the mother of three children and has nine grandchildren who all call the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky grandpa. She's indelibly printed on Mel forever.

These are women that have shown both vision and endurance, and I would ask that they both rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly today.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present three petitions signed by my constituents addressed to the Premier requesting the reinstatement of access by the War Amps to motor vehicle registration lists to be used in their fund-raising efforts.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in travelling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

head: Notices of Motions

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise now to give notice that after Oral Question Period I will be introducing a motion under Standing Order 40.

Thank you very much.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly today the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta 2001 annual report.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today five copies of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act review. In doing so, I'm very grateful to the hon. Member for Highwood, who chaired this committee, and also I'm grateful for the assistance provided on the committee by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and other Community Development and PDD officials who were involved.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have five copies of a response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to a question that was asked of me in question period on November 20, 2001.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a copy of a letter that I e-mailed to Mr. Mazankowski this morning requesting that he give advance briefing to our caucus just as he has given advance briefing today on his report to the Tory caucus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling is a letter from Marleen Cowan, president of the Riverside Meadows Community Association, opposing the proposed closure of the John Howard youth group home in Red Deer.

My second tabling is an e-mail from Gary Martin about Children's Services' cuts and urging the Minister of Children's Services to "stand up for what is right for society and not for what just makes a government look good."

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the required number of copies of a letter from the Lewis Estates Community League regarding the proposed casino project on the Enoch First Nations' lands.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter from Lise and Dave Riffel, who are very concerned that natural medicine is not covered by Alberta health care insurance.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table copies of requests from constituents regarding the War Amps key tag identification program asking that they be allowed access to lists that they've had since 1947 so that they can undertake their program.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail that I received at the constituency office from Catherine Roth. It is urging the government to "uphold its commitments and reconsider funding the Welcome Home Community."

The second tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the required number of copies of 20 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail I received from Brent Jeffery wanting to know how it can be justified that starting teachers have a salary of \$35,372, and nurses at that same starting position have a salary of \$52,639.

The second is a letter, as well, that I received from Michael Benoit, and Michael wants to know where the Alberta advantage is in regards to teachers' salaries, and it's titled Tired of Lip Service and Being Treated Unfairly.

Thank you.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table today the appropriate number of copies of a brochure of a conference being held tomorrow and the next day in Edmonton. The title of the conference: Protecting or Neglecting Groundwater? Whose Future Is at Stake?

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the required number of requests from Albertans who ask the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill, "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the very best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 29 bright and cheerful students that I had the pleasure of meeting with prior to coming into the Assembly today. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jill Atkins-Cyr, and also a few parents and, I might add, friends from my neighbourhood: Ms Lois MacLean, Mrs. Dawn Haack, Mrs. Debbie Claypool, Mrs. Searl, and

a special guest, the newly appointed Hon. Madam Justice Sheila Greckol.

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

1:40

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very special man. Emilio Woolsey is a seven year old and is a member of Champs through the War Amps program. He attends St. Lucy Catholic elementary school in Edmonton-Castle Downs. Although Emilio was born without his left arm, he has worked very hard to overcome his challenges. He has conquered his natural shyness and currently speaks publicly to other children, educating them about the Playsafe program. He has already accomplished three such presentations. Emilio today is accompanied by Madison, also his parents Claudia and Kirk Woolsey, grandma Shirley Helle, and two brothers, Kirk and Gerald. I would ask the Assembly to extend a warm welcome to those fine individuals. I'd ask them to stand, as well, in the members' gallery.

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

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and to introduce a very special person that helps both myself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that is our legislative assistant, Brendalee Loveseth. She's sitting up in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 66 students, staff, and parents from La Perle elementary school, one of the schools of excellence in my constituency. These bright, eager youngsters participated in the Race for the Riding program today and are enjoying a tour of this magnificent building at the moment. They'll arrive in the members' gallery after 2 p.m. Would you please give our visitors the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you. I wanted to introduce to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Assembly a group of students from my constituency, from the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school. Unfortunately, they're not in here just yet, but I wanted to make sure that they and their main teacher, Mr. Paul Holmes, were recorded in *Hansard*.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly 23 grade 6 students from the beautiful village of Boyle in my constituency. They are accompanied by their parents and teachers, and I believe they are seated either in the public gallery or the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise again today to

introduce somebody that has been very special in my life as well as the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. That would be our legislative assistant, Cheryl Koss. She might not be very tall in stature, but she's mighty in spirit indeed and I think one of the hardest working Leg. assistants in the building – I might be biased – and I would ask that Cheryl stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our very hardworking, competent, and cheerful administrative assistant, who I share with the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. I would ask that Stacey Leighton rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce someone who's a very good helper of mine, who has just been hired as my executive assistant. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that Dale Monaghan please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature Graham Steel. He's a young man who's enrolled in the doctors' program at the University of Alberta, and I'd like to ask him to rise with Aaron Roth, who's been introduced before. Graham, we wish you all the best in your future in the health services sector in Alberta. Congratulations on your participation.

Thank you.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two different people. The first is a visitor from Saskatoon, Mr. Arnold Edwards, one of Saskatoon's most prominent business leaders. Would he stand in the public gallery? Mr. Edwards is a member of the second generation of a family business that is now in its fourth generation, the Saskatoon Funeral Home. His family makes enormous contributions to the economic, cultural, and political life of the prairie provinces.

My second introduction is Mr. Edwards' sister Alma, who is a longtime resident of Edmonton. Would she rise? Alma is an award-winning writer and a pioneer in western Canadian television programming. Among many achievements she taught drama and television at Victoria composite high school in the 1960s, helping to plant the seeds for that school's growth into a major arts education centre. Her greatest achievement has been raising her four children, one of whom is me.

Please give them a warm welcome. Thank you.

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you all of the other Leg. assistants, who work very, very diligently and hard for the welfare and

direction of the MLAs here today. They are busy listening on the intercom and just can't make it.

head: Oral Question Period

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

### Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within eight months this government has gone from recording the largest surplus in the history of the province to cuts in spending of over a billion dollars. A number of other provinces, like Saskatchewan and Manitoba, draw upon a fiscal stabilization fund to sustain services for health, education, and their children. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Why do you refuse to be quality fiscal managers and set up a fiscal stabilization fund like Saskatchewan and Manitoba?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the path that this government has chosen is through fiscal responsibility. We believe that you cannot spend dollars that you do not have. We therefore go through a business planning process each year, which feeds into setting a budget. We also then follow through every quarter with an update to Albertans to let them know where things are going within the province.

Our goal since December of 1992 has been to present a plan that first of all eliminated our deficit – it is now against the law to run a deficit in this province – and, secondly, to pay off the accumulated debt that the province had built up over a number of years. We've stayed that path, and we've done it through a vehicle called the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That act governs us very, very dear and in fact is the one act that I give credit to for holding politicians' feet to the fire to stay the course and stay the plan.

What we have done with corrective actions, which I really wish the hon. Leader of the Opposition would pay attention to, is dealt with the fiscal realities that the whole world is facing today. Our plan was to deal with it in a managed process. We decided as a caucus and government that we would not put the long-term future of Albertans in jeopardy by doing what other jurisdictions have done by raising their debt level and running expenditures through their fiscal plan of this year that puts them further in debt. Our plan is a managed plan that focuses on the realities that are there in the global arena but also is backed up by our Fiscal Responsibility Act. We intend to follow that, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Provincial Treasurer: do I take it from that that stability is not part of the fiscal mandate of this government?

1:50

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about stability. In August the province of Alberta was the only government jurisdiction in all of Canada that received what I call the triple crown. We received a triple A rating from the Dominion Bond Rating Service, along with Moody's, along with Standard and Poor's. We're the only government in all of Canada to do that. Part of the reason was because of the fiscal plan that we have laid out and stayed the course on.

Now, all of that being said, what that has done for the economy in the province of Alberta is ensured that our growth continues. We have a framework that is conducive to investment and development. It attracts private investor capital to this province, which creates

jobs, creates stability, and creates confidence not only from investors but from consumers. The result is that the economy in the province of Alberta is moving two times faster than any other place in the entire country. So confidence is here because of this framework, not because of the frameworks in other jurisdictions that the hon. leader is talking about but because of the framework that is here in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Provincial Treasurer. So the policy of this government is cut, spend, cut, spend, cut, spend instead of the prudent, stable management of our fiscal policy. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, please. Hon. minister, please.

MRS. NELSON: I hope that the hon. Leader of the Opposition won't have a hissy fit when I give him the answers.

The situation in the province of Alberta is to manage the realities that face us in the economy. The alternative, which the Liberal leader would want, is for us to put us in debt, spend beyond our means, raise taxes, and not deal with reality. Albertans went into a contract with this government again this year and said: "Stay the course. Keep our taxes low, pay off our debt, and spend wisely." The corrective plan that we have put forward is in response to exactly what Albertans have asked us to do. This hon. member would like us to abrogate that responsibility and move away from it. We're not prepared to do that.

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

### Children's Services

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the government's mismanagement of its budget children's authorities are facing cuts that are forcing them to make decisions perceived by many to be shortsighted. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Is it good policy to force authorities to make decisions like the one that was made by a particular authority to terminate its contract with a fetal alcohol syndrome specialist who is a medical doctor with years of experience and give that contract instead to an individual with a two-year college diploma and no experience?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is citing a program which is under the local fetal alcohol syndrome co-ordinating committee, which is managed through selections of people representing a number of different authorities: the child and family services authority, the people that are on the health authority. A number of people are involved.

One of the great misnomers of the entire question period sessions from November 13 till today is that Children's Services has an exclusive right to the programs that are affecting children. So to supplement what is actually happening for children that have fetal alcohol syndrome, I'm going to ask my colleague the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to discuss some of the programs that are going on in that department that support children at high risk.

THE SPEAKER: I welcome and I will call on the hon. minister, but we're not here to discuss. We're here to answer questions on policy. The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the programs that are available for children that have fetal alcohol syndrome, I don't think that anybody in this

House is suggesting that they are not important. We do have a number of programs that we work on with other departments of government in developing a fetal alcohol syndrome initiative. One example of such a program is the Lakeland Centre for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. This is located in Cold Lake. What that program does is provide outreach services that serve the needs of individuals with fetal alcohol syndrome and their families in the communities in which they live. That's one example. There are many of course.

The point that I think needs to be made is that one cannot simply look at the Children's Services' budget and suggest that those are the only programs that are in operation. Nor is that the only source of funding. In a cross-government initiative we can devote resources from a number of different departments and get the best result for children in need with this particular situation.

DR. NICOL: It's a Children's Services' program that they're cutting, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the Minister of Children's Services: are you telling us that you have no standards set to determine who is qualified to make assessments, that it's up to the regional authorities totally in terms of how they set standards for doing assessments?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, Children's Services' standards are contained in the accountability document that is approved by the ministry on submission and agreement with each one of the authorities. They do have standards. They're expected to comply with those standards. We have also asked them through their service plans to come back and let us know those areas where they have made cost containment a priority so we're able to review those submissions. We have not received all of the submissions, although I understand most are on the way.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very satisfied that the local authorities understand clearly that priority must be given to the need to protect those children that are most needing care, not necessarily to engage in cost-containment strategies in any way that affects that particular area. It is still the priority for our government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Children's Services: are you telling this House that it is part of the standards and the guidelines that you give to the regional authorities that a person with a college degree and no experience has the capabilities to fully assess all of the needs of a child with fetal alcohol syndrome and make a proper recommendation of a diagnostic or remedial program?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not entirely sure I understand what the hon. member is driving at, but let me answer the question in this way, because there seems to be an allegation that the Ministry of Children's Services is not conducting due diligence on children at risk. For this entire week the hon. members have been challenged by me to bring the names forward of any child that's at risk. Only one name from the Leader of the Opposition has come forward, and I've addressed those concerns. So bring me the names.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Each year vulnerable children under government care or supervision are mistreated. Given human nature, Mr. Speaker, some incidents might be expected but surely not the hundreds of cases documented by the Children's Advocate and

recently confirmed by the Minister of Children's Services. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why is the department unable to keep safe young people that they remove from family homes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, much of what Children's Services has done has been redocumented in my response to the Children's Advocate report yesterday. Perhaps for further clarification the family law reform currently under way with the Minister of Justice will clarify some of these issues, and I would refer this question to him.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise the House that we are undergoing an extensive review of family law in the province to consolidate family law to make it more accessible to Albertans and to make sure that Albertans have a clear understanding of what family law is. The public consultation on that process is starting now and will be going on until the spring session. We hope to bring forward comprehensive review of family law in the spring session. That addresses directly the whole question of children in this province, because if people don't have access to good dispute resolution processes, if people don't have access to family mediation, if people don't have access to those sorts of issues, then family breakdown causes a lot of the problems, the root causes of some of the issues which the Children's Services department and, indeed, all departments of government have to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't end there. Maintenance enforcement has probably about 61,000 children that it provides for by collecting maintenance on behalf of children and families. We have a mediation process in the family law area. So there are many, many programs which are addressed to the root causes of why children are at risk and how we can prevent children from becoming at risk.

2:00

DR. MASSEY: It's all very interesting. These are children the government has in care. Why is the department unable to keep them safe once you take them out of their homes?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact it is a good question, because it really focuses on what happens when a child is taken into protective custody. What happens is that they are placed, frequently with their siblings, in homes where they are both part of either a temporary or permanent guardian relationship. Many of the children who made allegations of abuse while in care related to abuse by a sibling, their own; abuse by a parent on a visit, their own parent; and abuse under many circumstances. Indeed, when we are concerned that there may be abuse by a parent, we have visitation with social worker supervision. A child care worker is present, but Children's Services is not in the bedrooms of the nation, albeit maybe at times we should be. Quite frankly, these children are supervised to the best of the ability and due diligence of the workers and the parents, with every bit of training and faith and capacity. I truly hope that nobody in this House would ever suggest that our workers weren't doing a good and proper job.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the lack of quality placements is at the root of many of these cases, when can we expect some action from the minister?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are always looking for people who will become good foster parents and will be engaged in looking

after children. We are engaged in a number of programs not only to advertise for people to become part of our team and to be trained, but we are taking extensive recruitment through different parts of the province.

It's been exceptionally difficult this year because many of the children who have been coming into care – and I've cited this in the House before – for example 31 percent in one of our authorities, have been children over the age of 11, children whose parents have given up on them. The root of the problem, I would suggest, is not the government and the kind of care we're providing. The root of the problem stems from things which are occurring in families, where a family breakdown is concerned, and that is a problem that's much beyond the breadth and depth and responsibility of Children's Services.

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

### **Mazankowski Report**

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the leader of the New Democrat opposition asked a question of the Minister of Health and Wellness and received in response a torrent of abuse but no answer. Today I wish to repeat the question to the minister in the hope of a calmer, less confrontational, clearer, and more forthcoming answer. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how much money is this government planning to spend to promote, publicize, or otherwise communicate the recommendations of the Mazankowski report?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. member to budget debates. That is not the purpose of question period.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the minister's dodging and obfuscation can't save him. I ask the minister again: how much money, how many taxpayers' dollars is his government going to spend publicizing the recommendations of the Mazankowski report? This is not a budget question.

MR. MAR: Same question, same answer, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the Mazankowski committee is appointed by the Premier and reports to him, I ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: who is responsible for health policy in this government, he or the Premier?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that policy is developed through a very clear process in this government. It goes through our standing policy committees. It goes through our caucus. It goes through cabinet. These are decisions that we reach as a caucus, as a team. I don't know how the hon. member's caucus works. It's perhaps easier for them to meet. But that process is clear, and the responsibility for policy clearly rests with the government on this side of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### **Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne many comments have been made to me just recently about the fair market value of the heritage fund. It's declined to \$11.8 billion in the second quarter from \$12 billion in the first. My question is to the Minister of Revenue. With the

uncertainty in the markets today, sir, what do you expect the fund to drop over the balance of the year?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As he rightly said, we've seen over the past number of months the volatility of the marketplaces, and that's reflected in a drop in value of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. But we do actually project, in the forecast going forward, to see some stabilization. We now have revised our income forecast for this year to be \$175 million. We still see a prudent approach to diversifying your portfolio in stocks and bonds, in real estate as the best long-term strategy for maximizing the return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is to the same minister. With the provincial shortfall that's expected in revenues – and we've talked about it during this fall session – is now the time to dip into this fund to replace these shortfalls in this budget year?

MR. MELCHIN: Mr. Speaker, we have not been dipping into the principal of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. It has been there, and Albertans have continually said that we should retain it and see that it's there for future generations. However, we have used over \$25 billion of income that this fund has generated over the last 25 years to benefit Albertans substantially for their programs, for repayment of debt, for capital works projects, and it continues to provide income every year for the needs of all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister. There seems to be lots of confusion out in the public regarding the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. How are you letting Albertans know about the good news, and how this fund is being managed?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of good news to tell about the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. You know, when you go around and talk to people, there's a high awareness of the fund, but I do acknowledge that there's a low awareness of the value of that fund. It's a \$12 billion fund, and part of the challenge we have is seeing that Albertans are educated and know about its management, the income that's derived, the benefits that derive from the fund. Every year we announce quarterly reports, annual reports. We specifically try to go out and make sure it's very public. That information is sent out to all MLA offices. As part of the education we've also revamped the web site, [www.albertaheritagefund.com](http://www.albertaheritagefund.com). We would invite all Albertans to log on to that web site, acquaint themselves with the fund, its uses, its benefits.

A very significant part of this Legislative Assembly is an all-party committee that is there to oversee the fund, that is there to see that public meetings are also held on the fund. We've had just a tremendous annual meeting, the best we've had recently. It just happened to be in Whitecourt. A certain member, a former mayor, the previous mayor, and many of the citizens of Whitecourt came out: the best attendance. I would say interest in the fund is going up, and we'd compliment the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne on his efforts there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:10

### **Teachers' Contract Negotiations**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is predicted today that Edmonton teachers will almost definitely vote to go on strike. Now, a lump of coal is rich in carbon and rich as a symbol. This lump of coal is what the government wants to give Alberta teachers for Christmas. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier hold over the Legislative Assembly so that we can all work to find a resolution to the current contract talks?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would assume that this is what the hon. member is referring to. I would suggest that if the hon. member opened the package and had a little bite, he might recognize that it isn't coal.

### **Speaker's Ruling Items Distributed to Members**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're going to stop here right now, and I'm going to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar another opportunity to address his question.

The members have been coming to my office on almost a daily basis wanting to put things on every member's desk, and oftentimes there are no explanations. Yesterday we had complete confusion in this House when one member did not follow the policy of doing it. I received at least six to 10 notes saying: what is this ribbon? Today we have something with a piece of black coal. It's provided by one member to represent his constituency, but there's no explanation given, so there is confusion now.

All the time that was taken here to deal with this little matter in the question period we're going to add on to the end of the question period, and we're going to give the hon. member additional time in dealing with his question. In the future there will be less confusion with respect to these things being put on people's desks every day without going through a normal process and some explanation.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### **Teachers' Contract Negotiations (continued)**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is predicted today that Edmonton teachers will almost definitely vote to go on strike. It would be very nice if this government would not give the teachers a lump of coal for Christmas but give them some candy instead. Now, my first question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier please hold over the Legislative Assembly so that we can all work together to find a resolution to the current contract talks?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment may want to supplement my answer, but it is not my understanding that this Legislative Assembly has any responsibility or should in fact be involved in a negotiation that is clearly between the school authorities in this province and the teachers that they employ.

MR. DUNFORD: The Deputy Premier is entirely right. I think we need to have a perspective on all of this. Negotiations are under way right across the province as we speak. ATA locals are doing what they're supposed to be doing, and that's taking items to a collective bargaining table. School boards are doing what they're supposed to be doing, and that is negotiating towards an agreement. We're doing what we're supposed to be doing, and that's providing for mediators

whenever we're called upon by the parties. And the newspapers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, and that of course is ratcheting up if there might be any potential controversy in any of these issues.

So, sir, I think as we head into the holiday season, just relax a little bit and enjoy a merry, merry Christmas.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: if the government won't hold over the Legislative Assembly, isn't the Deputy Premier concerned that this sends out the message that the teacher couldn't care less about the teachers' negotiations?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I think the hon. member probably wasn't suggesting that the teachers didn't care about the teachers' negotiations.

I will only reiterate that this Legislative Assembly does not have a role in the negotiations, in my view, between duly elected school authorities, elected as recently as October 16 of this year, and the teachers that they employ. Secondly, I would remind the hon. member that in many, many, many questions we've been accused of interfering in those very negotiations, so I am hearing a bit of a conflict in this request today. Mr. Speaker, I believe that we all have a responsibility to allow those negotiations to proceed as they're supposed to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question will be to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. My final question is this: does the government have a plan to force the teachers to go on strike so that it can introduce legislation that makes teaching an essential service?

MR. DUNFORD: He's a mischievous little elf today; isn't he? The answer is no.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

### Feed Imports

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of importing corn from the United States and feed wheat from Ukraine into Quebec has been of concern to many barley growers and wheat growers in Alberta, who had such a poor growing season due to the drought this year. I know that many of my constituents are very concerned about the subsidized U.S. corn imports due to lower barley production and higher barley prices. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister advise what the government is doing to assist farmers who are caught in this predicament?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, certainly the department of agriculture has been monitoring this situation. The economics, of course, of bringing corn into the province on a regular basis is probably not sustainable; however, the issue now is probably not necessarily price but supply. Currently corn is trading on par with barley or very close to it. Cattle do need to be fed, and we do have a feed shortage. The fact is that it's a reality that if feed doesn't come in in whatever form from other parts of Canada or, indeed,

perhaps the U.S., we might have to move our cattle out, which in some instances we have had to do.

I should just inform the hon. member and other members that last year the Manitoba Corn Growers did file a complaint with the Canadian trade tribunal, and they did rule that although there was some dumping and maybe subsidization on pricing, it had not caused injury to prairie grain farmers. Therefore, there were no duties further charged, and the ones that had been collected were returned.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any challenge in this area from producers here, but we are going to certainly continue to monitor the situation and be concerned about the quality beef that we produce in this province, primarily barley fed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary to the same minister. It's been my understanding that the feed wheat coming into Quebec from Ukraine was subsidized. Has the minister been in contact with the Canadian Wheat Board to find out why the Canadian Wheat Board isn't protecting farmers from subsidized grain coming into this country?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have any information that would suggest that the wheat coming into Quebec from Ukraine was subsidized. Ukraine is not part of the European Union, and as I say, I don't have any information that would suggest that it was. However, the Canadian Wheat Board is, of course, a federal government agency which markets product both domestically and internationally, particularly wheat and barley, for producers in western Canada. As all Alberta producers know, they must sell their product through the Wheat Board, and as has been noted on many occasions, Alberta farmers would like that changed. They would like to have a choice, and certainly we're working with the federal government and the Canadian Wheat Board to try and effect that choice.

MR. MARZ: To the same minister again, Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental: has the minister received any information, then, from the Canadian Wheat Board that would explain why the Wheat Board would miss such a golden opportunity to market grain in Canada rather than allowing wheat into this country from Ukraine?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've had a couple of meetings with the Canadian Wheat Board over the last six weeks, one in Alberta and one in Winnipeg. There's no question that I raised the whole question of marketing and how they market. I would say that primarily over the years the Canadian Wheat Board has done a reasonable job of marketing grain, barley, and wheat for producers on the international side. However, there is a real concern on the domestic market. It seems ludicrous to producers in this province that they can invest in a farm, have all of the intellect to plant a crop, shepherd it through its growing season, harvest it, and then all of a sudden they become what I would term almost idiots, not intelligent enough to market it.

So we have asked the Canadian Wheat Board to consider change at least in the domestic market to allow producers to market their grain domestically. This may be a way of solving this issue so that grain can be sold producer to client. What I was told is that there will be elections again in 2002 and for us to try to continue to elect people that have like-minded views to those of Albertans. So, Mr. Speaker, that's my recommendation to people.

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

2:20

**Health Care Spending**

DR. TAFT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, health care spending in this province is in no way out of control. It's time this Minister of Health and Wellness gave some straightforward answers on this. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister deny that in the last fiscal year his department spent almost exactly the same amount per Albertan, adjusting for inflation, that it spent for each of the 10 years from 1983 to 1992?

MR. MAR: Well, that is quite a remarkable observation by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Indeed, it would appear that his observation is out of step with provinces in other parts of Canada. I should note also that those provinces may have Liberal governments. They may be NDP provinces. We of course have Liberal Senator Michael Kirby drawing conclusions about the sustainability of the health care system based on its current spending patterns. We've had a former NDP Premier, Mr. Romanow, of course drawing certain conclusions about the sustainability of health care.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that health care costs have gone up dramatically in this province. They were 24 percent of our overall provincial government spending some 10 years ago. They are now in the range of 35 percent. There are those that suggest that with the current expenditure increases, by the year 2008 it could reach 50 percent of our overall provincial government spending. I spoke with Minister Clement, the Minister of Health from the province of Ontario, just yesterday. He confirmed to me that 44 percent of Ontario's operating budget is spent on health care. That, of course, excludes capital spending, but on operating expenditures it's 44 percent. That is the reason why in the province of Quebec the Claire report has come out, why in the province of Saskatchewan the Fyke commission has done its work. That is the reason why the federal government has commissioned Mr. Romanow. It's the reason why the province of British Columbia is looking at strategies to look at the sustainability of their health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the statistics cited by the hon. member, but his conclusions I think are quite likely out of step with the balance of thought throughout the rest of this country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My material was taken straight from the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Will the minister deny that in the last fiscal year his government spent an even lower percentage of Alberta's gross domestic product on health than it spent on average for the 10 years from 1983 to 1992?

MR. MAR: Trying to express health care expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product is not a particularly useful exercise because of the size of the denominator, Mr. Speaker. So let us look instead at the types of services that are being provided. Let us look at the changing demographics. Let us consider what it is that people are paying for their health care system in the province of Alberta. To measure it against gross domestic product is not a particularly useful exercise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's actually a standard measure.

Will the minister deny that in the last fiscal year his government's spending on health was just barely above the per capita Canadian average?

MR. MAR: Well, I think it is well recognized by this hon. member and most health economists that there is a certain connection between the age of your population and the per capita expenditures. When adjusted for age, Alberta remains one of the highest per capita spenders on health care in this country. So, Mr. Speaker, again, while I acknowledge the source of the information cited by the hon. member, his conclusions, in my strong opinion, are completely wrong.

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

**First Nations Gaming Policy**

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in the community of Lewis Estates have expressed interest in the new First Nations gaming policy announced in January 2001. Their interest is due to the proposed casino on the Enoch First Nations lands adjacent to their community. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Will the minister please tell me how the policy works?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite correct that it was in January of this year that the First Nations gaming policy was announced. That policy came about as a result of negotiations between this government and Alberta First Nations in the year 2000. I think it's important to recognize that in Alberta we have a charitable gaming model, the only one in Canada, and the First Nations gaming policy is an integral part of that charitable model. First Nations gaming will be regulated by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission and will operate generally under the same terms and conditions as traditional casinos.

There are, however, some differences that are worth noting. The first is that the host First Nation will be designated as a charity through a distinct not-for-profit society. As such, there will not be some 180 charities per year that will be working at the on-reserve casino. Additionally, there will be a portion of the proceeds from slot revenue, some 40 percent, that will fund a new lottery fund initiative, the First Nations development fund. The terms of that particular fund are currently being discussed with the hon. Minister of Community Development, and ultimately the terms will be announced. That First Nations development fund will support the economic, social, and community development projects on the First Nations, including such matters as addiction programs, education, health, and infrastructure.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, thank you very much.

I would like to point out *Beauchesne* 428, which prohibits questions seeking information which is clearly available in published reports and the like.

Go on, hon. member.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the Minister of Gaming. In light of the recently announced gaming licensing policy review, what is the consultation process surrounding any new First Nations casino?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the key components of the review was to ensure that communities would have a prominent role in determining whether or not a casino would



occur within their community. In the case of First Nations proposing an on-reserve casino, expressed consent in the form of a band resolution is necessary. Additionally, there must be a land use designation supporting the facility provided to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission.

I might advise that no such applications can be received at this time. There is still a moratorium in place. It is proposed that it will be lifted in January 2002. Yesterday the AGLC went out to start its consultation with stakeholders with respect to operational policies that are necessary to be put in place prior to the lifting of the moratorium.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. If the Enoch First Nation were to submit a proposal for a new casino, would the views of my constituents in Lewis Estates be taken into account, including the infrastructure issues that approval of such a project will create in the area, such as the major roadway upgrades to 79th Avenue, otherwise known as Whitemud Drive, and to Winterburn Road?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, community support for the on-reserve casino will be community support from the reserve in question, once again reflecting the terms of a band resolution. Similarly, community support in a non First Nations area will be from that municipality. If there happens to be an adjacent reserve, the support of that reserve will not be looked to. Having said that, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission in certain cases might consider objections from adjacent communities if those objections deal with some matter that may materially affect the viability of a proposed casino.

Regarding casino development as such, it's up to First Nations to look after their infrastructure and servicing requirements, and this must be done in co-operation with adjacent municipalities.

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

2:30

### **Women's Shelters**

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Taber and district family crisis centre spent years raising money and then building and furnishing a 20-bed emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence. The CFSA confirmed the need for the shelter and made verbal assurances of the availability of an operating budget. Since November of 2000 the ministry has avoided that commitment in a series of form letters. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why did the children's authority stand by and watch these volunteers build a shelter that the authority knew it couldn't fund?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that there has to be a better framework for the shelter construction that is done by people throughout the province. The operative words in the hon. member's question are the words "verbal assurances." The board itself had not issued or agreed with the mandate of this particular facility. The hon. member that represents the people of this constituency has been on top of the issue, has met with those individuals that have built the shelter capacity. We have been discussing with the child and family services authority in Sun Country the best ways to manage the issues there now.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, many people feel motivated to build shelter

capacity in communities. We have significant development and planning in other parts of that constituency for shelters, and the dollar support for the operations is also significant. There are many other centres in Sun Country where they have not only planned but have actually looked at, designed, and plotted the budget capacity within the community. There are only so many shelters that we can support. We are very sensitive to this issue. We are working with the authority and looking at perhaps next year being able to support the planning.

The partnership for construction of shelters is with the community and the local child and family services authority. Mr. Speaker, in this particular instance this has become the trigger for our further examination of what the shelter construction policy should be and what we should do to encourage people to address the needs of women as well as children where they are victims of violence but not necessarily always through shelters, which may not be the total solution.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. To this same minister. We've had shelters in this province for over 20 years. Why hasn't the ministry developed an overall plan for women's shelters in this province? How many do we need? Where should they be? Why don't they know this?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there are indeed almost 30 shelters, 19 of which receive funding directly from this ministry. Some are funded in other ways, on First Nations reserves, for example, by the federal government. When we decentralized to the child and family services authorities, there was a hope that with not only the work done by those authorities in dealing with children and families that are affected by violence but also in the interpretation of the legislation for protection of victims of violence by removing the perpetrator of violence from the home, we would also make significant inroads in protecting families and, more than that, in getting families help and retribution where they need it. The policy that was in effect early in the '90s no longer seems appropriate, because we have a number of developments in the sexual assault centre. So we're looking at all of these aspects, and over the next year I hope we've got a framework that is agreeable to the members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: aside from increases specific to salaries, why have shelters been forced to continue to work under a 1985 funding model?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, a shelter by its very nature is a temporary solution. Fundamentally what our society has to look at is how we can reduce the violence that occurs in the homes of the people of Alberta and, in fact, necessitates shelters and necessitates other measures. I think the hon. member is fully aware of an additional dollar commitment made by this ministry this year and additional supports that have been made. Even during this period when throughout the ministries of government we are reducing by 1 percent, the shelters themselves have continued to receive support. I think we could engage in further discussion, but at this time that's all I have to answer it.

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

### Aboriginal Children's Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the aboriginal coalition of Edmonton held an emergency meeting. At that meeting, the coalition called for the name of the Ma'Mōwe Capital region to be changed to a nonaboriginal name. Ma'Mōwe means "all together" in Cree, and the government's recent actions are perceived by this coalition as a serious breach of that principle, as well as a breach of faith with the aboriginal community. All of my questions are to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. My first question: given that most of the cuts identified in the document tabled by the minister yesterday negatively impact agencies that benefit aboriginal children, can the minister please explain to this house why this breach of faith with the aboriginal community?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I indicated that of those early intervention reductions in the Ma'Mōwe region only 19 percent were directly affecting aboriginal children. We are dealing with a reduction that is modest in comparison with the overall budget. I would remind the hon. members of this House that we had a 35 percent increase in the budget of Children's Services over the last two years. The \$647 million represents an extraordinary increase, and on behalf of aboriginal people on reserves, we added in, after that 1 percent reduction, \$4 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Ma'Mōwe child and family services authority still is working together. The people that are represented on that board are very pleased to review the programs, and they remind me that many of these programs that have been reduced are programs which should have been affected because by their very nature they were not doing all they should be doing in the protection of children and in the encouragement of children to grow safe, secure, and independent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me ask the minister another question on the numbers that she quoted here. Can the minister please explain the statement in the document she tabled yesterday that only 6 percent of the early intervention program is being cut when the cuts in a total \$6.5 million early intervention budget for the Ma'Mōwe region are closer to 50 percent, not 6 percent?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, some key messages about the Ma'Mōwe cuts and just a correction to the hon. member. The document that I generously shared yesterday was not in fact tabled in the House, but at the conclusion of my remarks I will be pleased to table that so it would be here, the required number of copies for the record.

The reductions in Ma'Mōwe were effective in terms of dealing with some of the information technology needs, the travel, the freeze on the numbers of people that were employed in the Ma'Mōwe child and family services agencies, the administrative efficiencies. In fact, in the cuts that have been made, 22 agencies or programs were either terminated or reduced because they were not under the criteria ensuring that children, youth, and families were not put at risk. They were in fact superfluous in many cases to that design. Learn to swim programs by their very nature are very nice for children to have, but they are not programs that keep children from risk, from abuse, either neglect or the serious concerns we deal with under the child and family services authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: why is the minister failing to get the message that the unilateral cuts to

programs benefiting aboriginal children are unacceptable – unacceptable – to the aboriginal community? The minister seems to be deaf to the message.

2:40

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, at last count I've had 10 percent of the questions in the House in this session, and believe me: I've got the messages.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, despite stopping the clock for one minute, unfortunately there were a number of members who were not able to get their questions today, and I apologize for that.

Prior to the Clerk announcing Members' Statements, an hon. minister would like to revert in the Routine to tablings. Would there be support for that?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports  
(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of my response to Written Question 5 that I wish to table.

Thank you, sir.

head: Members' Statements

### Volunteer Wall of Fame

MR. LORD: Mr. Speaker, throughout 2001 many organizations across Alberta have been actively involved in promoting the International Year of Volunteers among the province's volunteer sector. I am sure that we have all watched and cheered as Alberta communities engaged in a major effort to raise the profile of volunteers and to raise the public consciousness of the role that volunteers play in all our communities, and an important role it is, indeed. In fact, I recently read a report indicating that if the efforts of volunteers in our society were ever to be quantified and measured, it is estimated that the amount of services delivered by our volunteer sector – if we had to pay wages for all this work that's so selflessly donated, the budget required for this might rival if not even exceed that of government.

Frankly, I don't think that we can say enough good things about the efforts of our volunteers across Alberta. Thus, it was very fitting and proper to have had a year dedicated to them. Now we are quickly approaching the end of 2001 and thus the end of the International Year of Volunteers. The efforts this past year have certainly succeeded in leaving us all with a greater appreciation of all the vital contributions that volunteers of all ages make to our communities as well as a desire to show our support for their continuing efforts.

So I'm very pleased to inform this Assembly and all Albertans that on this December 5 coming up, which is declared to be International Volunteer Day, the Wild Rose Foundation and Alberta Community Development will unveil a new volunteer wall of fame in the pedway mall of Government Centre to commemorate and highlight the effort of volunteers across our province in contributing to an increased quality of life for all. This is such an important event that our hon. Premier himself and the hon. Minister of Community Development will be presiding over the induction of 13 members, Alberta volunteers, to this volunteer wall of fame, the first to be entered into it. New portraits of outstanding volunteers will be added each year going forward.

As the International Year of Volunteers comes to a close, I would ask that this Assembly join me in congratulating the volunteers who will be honoured through the volunteer wall of fame and, indeed, join me in applauding all the wonderful and very important volunteers throughout our province.

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

### **Forest Protection**

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a number of years, in conjunction with groups like the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga, the Official Opposition has been lobbying the government to protect larger areas of Alberta's forests. Along with many Albertans we had great hopes for the Special Places 2000 program, but in the end we watched deadlines go by and listened to excuses about why areas could not be protected and how starting points had become the final product. There are acreages with more land than some of the areas protected under this program.

In various policy statements and documents the government has recognized the need for large areas of protected forests. The importance of ecological management is not something new. What the government can't seem to do, however, is find a way to get those words off the paper and into action. They do little bits and pieces here and there, but they have not made a real commitment to substantial habitat protection.

The Official Opposition does not want to put up signs that say: industry go home. We believe that development can be done in a reasonable manner. Sensitive areas must be protected, and the industrial footprint can be reduced. The only thing stopping the process is the lack of will on the government's part. We cannot afford to debate habitat protection for another 20 years while the trees are cut down and the rivers fill with silt and chemicals. We have the research, and we know what needs to be done. Albertans do care, and they expect action from their government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

### **Coal Industry**

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the coal industry in Alberta and its importance to West Yellowhead. Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in the world and the international fuel of choice for electrical generation. Alberta is blessed with an enormous amount of coal. Reserve estimates indicate that the province has enough coal to generate electricity at the current consumption rate for the next 800 years. Alberta has a competitive advantage over a number of other countries because Alberta's resources are widely distributed, have low-cost production, low sulfur content, and have a diverse technical characteristic that can compete in a number of domestic and international market sectors.

Our province's mines generate 90 percent of Alberta's electricity and in 2000 exported over 6 million tonnes of coal annually to 12 countries, mainly for steel production. In 1999 Alberta produced approximately half of Canada's coal production. Coal contributes substantially to the Alberta advantage through the major role that it plays in terms of energy, investment, trade, income generation, and employment. There are 12 active coal mines in Alberta, of which three – the Coal Valley, Luscar, and Obed mines – are in West Yellowhead. I am encouraged by the efforts to get the Smoky River coal mine back in operation under new management. The proposed Cheviot mine will also generate greater economic activity in the region.

I cannot stress enough the importance of the coal industry to the economy of West Yellowhead and Alberta as a whole. With our coal, oil, and natural gas Alberta's status as a key energy supplier in North America is assured well into the future. As a small token of the coal industry, you will find a small gift package on your desks. As we approach Christmas, you may get this in your stocking anyway.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Teachers' Contract Negotiations**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is predicted that Edmonton teachers will almost certainly decide to go on strike. Their decision will affect thousands of students and parents, yet the government has no valid plan to deal with the issue. I urge the government to hold over the legislative session so that a resolution to the teachers' contract dispute can be found before Christmas. If this government doesn't hold over the Legislature, it will send a strong message to Edmonton teachers that their concerns are not important.

I would like to point out that in 1999 at a Conservative Party policy convention it was recommended that the teaching profession become an essential service. In the last 100 years in Edmonton there have only been two teachers' strikes. This Conservative government has put its policy resolutions before the interests of the province's children. Maybe a decade from now students will learn how 2001 was the year they stopped being important. The government's current hard line of confrontation, not negotiation with teachers indicates that it wants to force them to strike so that it can have an excuse to legislate the teaching profession as an essential service.

Teachers work very hard because they love their jobs and the children whom they serve. Like anyone, they expect fair compensation for what they do. The government considers teachers to be essential, but it won't even sit down and talk to them. The government considers teachers to be essential, but it gives them no respect. I urge the government to stick around long enough to deal with teachers' issues. I urge the government to respect teachers and find a resolution to their problems rather than shackle them to overcrowded classrooms with inadequate resources. I urge the government to finally make teachers and public education a priority.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we would ask the Government House Leader to share with us any projected government business that he may have.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that for the first time in living memory the Order Paper is clear.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, for the 12 days in this fall session we've had a dearth, a lack of points of order. Today it seems we may have up to four of them.

So let me first of all call on the Leader of the Official Opposition on a point of order.

### **Point of Order Decorum**

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I just want to take this opportunity to recognize that through this session and through your tenure here you've really tried to maintain decorum in the House. I broke that decorum this afternoon, and I apologize to you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order. You have two, so the first that you would deal with, in a note you sent me.

#### Point of Order

##### Notice of Motion under Standing Order 40

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed. I wanted to raise a point of order with respect to the purported notice of motion that was received today with respect to a Standing Order 40 motion. I rise under Standing Order 2 because I find that the Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* don't provide us with an awful lot of help, at least on a cursory review, in this area.

It has been the custom and practice of this House that notices of motions under Standing Order 30 and Standing Order 40, the two urgent Standing Orders, are normally delivered to the Speaker's office, as I understand it, prior to 11 o'clock on a given day. Then oral notice is given in the House, and then the notice of motion comes up under Orders of the Day.

Now, it is true that the Standing Order itself negates Standing Order 38 in saying that there is no written notice necessary for a Standing Order 40 notice of motion, and in fact no one expects written notice. But today we had a most unusual occurrence, and that is the receipt of a letter saying that there would be a Standing Order 40 notice of motion brought up, and then during Notices of Motions the hon. Leader of the Opposition stood and gave notice that he was going to bring forward a motion. But under most understandings of Notices of Motions it includes the content or the subject of the notice of motion. Otherwise it is not a notice of motion. It's just telling you that there's going to be one, and that is not what a notice of motion, in my understanding, means.

So I would ask you as the Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 2, if there are not other Standing Orders which cover it or in *Beauchesne*, which, as I acknowledge, I haven't been able to find in a cursory look, to outline for us the appropriate procedure to be used in this House. Quite frankly, I find the process that was used this afternoon with respect to the notice of motion highly inappropriate. I have absolutely no problem with the concept that urgent notices should be brought to the House and no problem with them being brought even at the time of Notices of Motions, even though the Speaker's office is usually given advance notice. The custom and practice has been that the House receives notice of this motion and members receive notice or at least the Government House Leader typically has received notice prior to the opening of the session during the day. That may have been just a courtesy in practice, and if that is the case, then I'd be interested in that being outlined for us, but it's in my view totally inappropriate to rise during Notices of Motions and give no notice of motion, only advise the House that there will be a motion, which is not under the definition of notice of motion.

THE SPEAKER: Shortly, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Of course. Very shortly. Certainly the information in the notice of motion was immediately distributed to all members in the Legislature upon the Leader of the Official Opposition having given notice. We presumed that that was a common practice from previous presentations of these kinds of motions and find that there was nothing wrong with the process.

THE SPEAKER: Are there other hon. members that want to participate?

Hon. members, there are basically two Standing Orders that come

into play with respect to this. The whole objective of all of this is to waive the ordinary Routine of the day and abrogate it and then proceed to another order of business. In one case, under Standing Order 30, there's a required ruling by the chair. In the case of Standing Order 40 it's by unanimous consent of the House. So later on this afternoon, when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is recognized, the Leader of the Official Opposition under Standing Order 40 will rise and very, very briefly provide a "case of urgent and pressing necessity." Then the chair will ask: is there unanimous consent to proceed? If one member says no, that's where it's ended. No debate, nothing else, done. So that's the process.

Now, in terms of the manner in which this has been dealt with, in terms of Standing Order 30 there's absolutely no doubt at all about the fact that there is a requirement to advise the Speaker's office two hours prior to that, but no such requirement is contained in Standing Order 40. In the past we've had Standing Order 40s when the chair has not been informed. The chair has been in the chair when this part of the Routine has been recognized. An hon. member stood up and basically said: I intend to later in the afternoon rise on a Standing Order 40 and to request unanimous consent of the House to consider an urgent matter of business. So we've had both of these and more and even in this session.

I do believe that with the last Standing Order 40 that was dealt with in this House, the chair, after recognizing an hon. member to proceed with it, had no knowledge of what it would be. In today's situation the letter arrived in the Speaker's office at 11:50, which was a courtesy. It was not required but was a courtesy. Then when the hon. member stood up early in the afternoon and basically indicated what it was, that was the point in time that the chair, like every other member, found out what the text of it was. That's a courtesy. That was not a requirement under Standing Order 40, because Standing Order 40s are negated very quickly by the need for unanimous consent. Needless to say, it works this way. If hon. members feel that they have been slighted because of a lack of courtesy or knowledge about what this would be, the chances of them giving approval to waive the Routine of the day would be negated pretty easily and pretty quickly.

So it would be a great courtesy, but it's not a requirement. That has not been violated today. We will wait a few minutes from now, when we recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to formally proceed with his Standing Order 40, and find what the response of the House will be when the question is on unanimous consent.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. You wish to proceed now? Okay.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands identified to the chair his desire to rise on a point of order, but the member was not sure whether or not the member wanted to rise on a point of order or a point of privilege. There was a consultation, but the hon. member wanted to have the benefit of the Blues or the *Hansard* before he would rise. So he advised the chair yesterday that he wanted to rise on a point of order today on a matter resulting out of the question period yesterday. That in itself is a bit unusual, but there are some mitigating circumstances in the background, and the chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

#### Point of Order

##### Provoking Debate

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order pursuant to Standing Order 23(h). Standing Order 23(h) says that a member shall be called to order if allegations are made against another member by imputing "false or unavowed motives" or using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create

disorder.” I also cite *Beauchesne* 417, that a reply in Oral Question Period should “deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate.”

In yesterday’s question period the Minister of Health and Wellness in response to a very legitimate question raised by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona violated each one of the above citations. In his answer to the member’s first question the minister said and I briefly quote from *Hansard*:

The hon. member does not appear to be able to get his own facts straight on a number of occasions. We know that between him and his colleague who sits to his left, his far left perhaps – between the two of them they are not able to do a sufficient amount of research to provide us with a question on government policy as opposed to mere insinuation.

Clearly, these remarks are argumentative, they are insulting, and they are certainly designed to provoke debate. I therefore ask that the point of order be sustained, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought it prudent in a circumstance of this nature where no one is even aware of the point having been raised that notice might have been given to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness so that he might be able to speak in his own defence.

That being said, it would appear from what was read that there was nothing more than banter of the usual nature, and I would suggest that it’s nothing more than that and need not be sanctioned.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on this point of order.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hardly could the Government House Leader state that what occurred yesterday in question period was merely banter. The minister of health was very aggressive in his comments and certainly was targeting the member from whom the point of order was raised. I would ask that the Government House Leader withdraw the comment that it was mere banter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point of order. Please be brief.

3:00

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I was here for this discussion, and as I read the point that the hon. member is raising, it’s clear that the Minister of Health and Wellness was simply referring to the size of the caucus of the third party, with no dishonour meant. It simply says that there are only two of them, who are perhaps unable to do a sufficient amount of research. On the basis of that, I don’t believe there was any insult intended by that remark.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the last several days in the Assembly you’ve seen a lot of body movement by the chair during the question period. Members have observed that. In fact, members might have observed that on almost every question that has been raised in the last several days and on almost every answer given in the last several days. Now, there are exceptions to this. There are exceptions. Some exchanges have been top-notch, of total value, to be used as examples for the future, but there has been a tendency in the last several days to have questions seeking opinion and other types.

Now, I’m not going to spend a great deal of time dealing with

*Beauchesne*, but in *Beauchesne* 409:

It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate . . .

The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

I can go on and on.

Now, the same rules basically apply, though, to answers as well, by custom and tradition and everything else. It’s also fair to say that there has been some intensity on the odd occasion in the last several days in some of the questions and the answers, perhaps in terms of the exchange that occurred between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who the chair in his own view thought was rather enthusiastic with his question, and then observed the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, who again the chair thought was rather enthusiastic as well. Perhaps the word “enthusiastic” is better than “aggressive” or something else. Let’s just assume that it’s all in the spirit of the time that we’re at, at the concluding days of a session.

I know that this may not be the best reading that people would want on Saturday mornings, but over the next couple of months let’s just take a good look at some of this stuff and see exactly how we might want to deal with it. Intensity is fine. The chair has the *Hansard* in front of him, and I would like to indicate as well to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands that the Minister of Health and Wellness did meet with me personally and did indicate that he was rather aggressive, but he was very concerned that an individual who’s not in this Assembly whose reputation was coming under question – now, that’s what his assumption was, and it was in that light that he was responding. So it strikes me that no one is purely innocent in all of this, and by the same token the chair will not find anyone purely guilty.

The hon. Government House Leader on the second point of order.

### Point of Order Exhibits

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to raise a point of order under 501 to 504 of *Beauchesne* with respect to the use of exhibits by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but I will withdraw that point of order and follow the good example of the hon. Leader of the Opposition with respect to decorum in the House and thank him for his remarks instead.

THE SPEAKER: For the clarity of the House, was an exhibit used by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar? Okay. The chair would like to clarify again. The chair interceded at that point in time because there was absolute confusion, which was unfair to the Deputy Premier, who had the question directed to her, and I believe unfair as well to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

From time to time people come and want to bring exhibits into this Assembly. There is a process, and sometimes we get maybe a little enthusiastic about these exhibits. So the process is important, but never once should the exhibit become then a problem for hon. members within the Assembly. No one suggests for a moment that the exhibit today provided by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead falls into that category, because it was done in good faith, but therein lies part of the problem.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Having said all of that, we’re now dealing with the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and his application for a Standing Order 40 request.

### Children's Services

Dr. Nicol:

Be it resolved that this Assembly address a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the need for a full debate on the cuts to the Children's Services budget, which threaten the well-being and future of Alberta's children.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard a lot of debate about and a lot of questions about the current status of children in the province in the past three-week period of our session. There have been a lot of issues raised, a lot of input provided to all members of this Legislature by constituents, by individuals, and by families. I think it's important, as we look at how we address the issues they're raising and in the context of the discussion here in the Legislature, that we look at, first of all, two different aspects of what we've seen arise during this week.

First of all, the issue comes up that the change in budgeting truly has affected services that are being provided to children. Even though they're in a transitional state, they're in a sense unexpected by the families and the children that have been getting these services on a past basis or in an historic manner. What we're looking at, then, is that the recipients of these services have sensed or felt that the change in service has directly affected their children, yet we've heard on numerous occasions in this House the minister insisting that no children are being affected within the context of the mandate that she sees for her department. So what we need to do here is really look at how that mandate for her department fits with both the historic services that have been provided under the auspices of her department and the expectations of families and children in our province in terms of what they can access through her department.

The second issue that I wanted to raise today and feel strongly that we should clarify for Albertans before the end of this session is the fact that on November 20 the minister spoke about a new response model, and it appears that what she's looking at here and basically saying is that her department is solely responsible for children who are in immediate danger as opposed to any of the preventative programs that have historically been offered through her department. So I think it's important especially at this time, as the government is preparing to undertake discussions and processes for the new budgets that will be coming forward to deal with our next fiscal year starting in April, that we clarify for Albertans the true status of what is the mandate and what is the responsibility of the Minister of Children's Services. You know, this is where we're looking at the kind of issue that comes up, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what we see as the responsibility of this department for the relationship between the children's authorities and the families and the children that are in those communities. They have seen the Alberta government, through its mandate, as a means to deal with the issues of stability that they can perceive both in caring for their children and for the role of children in their community.

So I think it's really important that we take time this afternoon and dedicate it to a clear debate of what is our option and what are options for delivery models for children's services in this province. It's really a critical issue, based on the calls that have been coming into the offices we've been in communication with, and it's important that Albertans understand if there is to be a change in mandate of that department.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. leader. I'll now ask the question under Standing Order 40.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:10

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

### Bill 31

#### Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 31, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No.2), for third reading.

As has been previously outlined for the House, while we normally do not debate miscellaneous statutes, as they only get introduced with the unanimous consent of all three parties in the House, we have by special agreement agreed to debate the particular section of the act relative to electoral boundaries.

The provision in the act itself really does only one thing. It changes the date so that rather than having to wait until June of 2003 to appoint an Electoral Boundaries Commission, which would then have the result of the commission having a year under the act – seven months to bring in its initial report and five months thereafter to bring in a final report – to do a redistribution process, which would end up close to the time of the next election, we believe that with the census having been taken in the year 2000 and with the new information available and with the imbalance that's obviously there, it would be prudent and in the interest of all Albertans to do a redistribution earlier than as provided in the act and to therefore just change the date so that it could be done prior to the June 2003 date which would otherwise have been provided for. Of course, after the commission reports, then the report has to be brought to the Legislature, and there has to be a resolution of the Legislature. Then the report, if accepted by the Legislature, has to be translated into an act to go to a session. So it's really an 18-month process, at the least, and perhaps a two-year process. So it is very prudent in our view, Mr. Speaker, to deal with the issue by bringing in an amendment. We've chosen, with the good graces of the opposition, to do it by way of just changing the date to allow us to call the commission earlier, as provided for in this amendment made through the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act.

Now, I've had the privilege of reading the Blues from earlier debate, and there is some suggestion that other issues should be dealt with. I think that's probably outside the scope of the debate, but I will say this, Mr. Speaker. I have some history with redistribution, having been an active member of a political association since I was about 14 years old and having been involved in redistribution processes from outside this House on numerous occasions previously. I can tell all members of this House that the act that we have in place now is probably the best, in terms of setting up the parameters for a redistribution commission, that you could find anywhere. It puts the discretion in the hands of the commission to draw boundaries in an appropriate way, and it gives the commission very, very broad parameters and considerations in which to do it.

Previous acts in this province have tried to delineate how many seats should be urban and how many should be rural, have tried to delineate what was urban and rural, have tried to handcuff the hands of the commission in terms of how they draw the boundaries, but the act that we have now does not do that. It does not handcuff the commission. In fact, it gives the commission some broad guidelines with respect to what it should consider or what it may consider. Actually, it says, "shall take into consideration," and I think it's important to look at what it shall take into consideration. Essentially those parameters talk about what goes to the very essence of

representing Albertans in this Legislature: how you get in contact with them, how many people you have to contact, how far you have to go to do it, and how far you have to come to the Legislature. Things like:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations . . .
- (c.1) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (c.2) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries,
- (d) the number of municipalities and other local authorities,
- (e) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (f) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

The act doesn't tell the commission how to take those into consideration. It just says to the commission that these are relevant considerations to take into account when determining what boundaries there should be.

The only other thing I want to add, then, in the discussion – I do believe that we're doing the right thing by appointing a commission which is a bilateral commission. It has two members appointed by the opposition and two members appointed by the government and a chair who has to come from a specified category of people, as outlined in the act. So it's a very fair process. One of the things that we often get into is this discussion of the equality of a vote. I just want to very briefly dwell on this question of equality of a vote.

In Alberta we have a unicameral system; we have one House. Nationally, of course, we have a bicameral system with a House and a Senate. Quite often in Alberta we argue that the Senate should be effective, equal, and elected and that we need an effective, equal, and elected Senate because we don't have the population that Ontario has and therefore we don't have the representation in the House of Commons that Ontario has because we effectively do the redistribution basically on a population basis. Now, they have some parameters, as well, to vary that. But we argue vociferously from Alberta of the need to have an equal, elected, and effective Senate to bring the regional viewpoint into that discussion. Well, Mr. Speaker, how do we bring in the viewpoint of the region in a unicameral setting unless we take into account the very things that are set out in the act as direction to the commission to consider in terms of the various regions of the province having an effective voice in this House?

Now, I come from an urban constituency. I could argue that we should have an absolute equality of votes and that that somehow would improve the representation of the process, because each vote in the province would be equal. But, as you know, even if you did that on an absolute basis, it would only be so for a day, because populations move, constituencies grow, and constituencies change. So you'll never have absolutely equality of votes except for that one moment in time when you actually drew the boundaries to do it. Even then, you probably wouldn't be able to get it that accurate.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There will always be an inequality of votes. The question is how big and for what reason. I think it's a perfectly valid reason in a province such as ours, where there is a balance of interests to be represented in the Legislature from all regions of the province and a need for all regions of the province to be heard and to have an effective voice. It's more than just counting up the numbers and dividing by the number of seats to arrive at equality of vote. Equality of vote has also got to be an ability for members to be effective representatives by being able to be in touch with their constituents, by being able to meet with all the representative bodies

in their constituencies, and by being able to properly get the information to assist them in bringing that information to the House.

That equality of vote is not just achieved, Mr. Speaker, by adding up the number of people in the province and dividing by the constituencies and saying that that provides an equal vote. It does not. The act which we have in Alberta is an act which I think – I'm very proud that we have it, because we've moved away from all the restrictions which the Legislature used to put on in doing a redistribution. We've given a commission a broad mandate. We've said: you should take into account as a first order of business "the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." We've provided for other parameters. We then let the commission of Albertans go through the province and hear representations from Albertans as to how Albertans believe the boundaries should be drawn, come up with an interim report and then go back and justify that interim report to Albertans, hear again how Albertans think that the boundaries should be drawn, and then come back to the House with an independent report.

It's a good process, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent act. The only thing that needs to be changed, in my humble opinion, is the date so we can get on with the job.

3:20

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to stand for a few minutes and discuss the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act amendment that's in the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. I want to, effectively, agree with the Government House Leader in his comments that in the context of providing, if you want to call it, nonpartisan guidance to the commission, the current act does a reasonable job of that. What we want to do, though, is also look at the structure of the amendment now, and I think I'll just kind of put on record some of the comments that might be useful, I guess, in the future.

I also want to thank the Government House Leader for his efforts. While we were developing this, he had a chance to meet with both myself and the leader of the third party opposition and discuss how it was going to be brought about, how it was going to be set up. I guess the suggestion maybe for the next time, because it's too late for this time now, might be to try and make this kind of an amendment – what we're doing here now is that this amendment is going to have to be made every time we want to have a boundary redistribution. What we should be doing is looking at some of the parameters that were in the act that we're deleting. Basically we should be setting a series of guidelines that just say that this should have been commissioned during the First Session of the Legislature sitting after a certain number of times after the previous one. So it becomes automatic unless for some reason, because we have very short Legislatures, we end up out of kilter.

You know, one of the main things that will be used in this is the census of Canada. That's being completed, will be available for them, hopefully, by early spring to use as a basis for their judgment. So what we should have been looking at, instead of putting a specific date in there, was just allowing it to occur on a regular basis during the First Session of a particular Legislature. But this serves our purpose now. It's good. It will get the commission started. It will get the process started, and it will provide for the information that'll come from the census to be the basis for it.

A couple of things that I want to look at in the context of how we charge that commission. I think one of the things that has to be

looked at is that the committee should see their mandate as something a little broader than just drawing a set of lines on a map, because as the Government House Leader mentioned, there are a lot of different aspects that come about in the context of how do we get effective representation, not necessarily just equality of representation, and the trade-off that has to occur here. You know, in a representative government there should be a degree of adherence to the concept of one person, one vote, or everybody's vote has the same weight if they choose to exercise it. That's part of the issue that in this process we can't address. What we also may want to look at in terms of our discussions about this whole process of trying to develop new constituency maps, moving into subsequent elections, is: how do we deal, as well, with encouraging people to exercise that vote? But that's not the mandate of this change, Mr. Speaker. We should deal with that in another debate.

In the context of the mandate we're giving to this commission, what we should look at is: how do we make sure that they act in a way that will be acceptable to most Albertans? We have to make sure that some degree of equality is adhered to in the vote, but we also want to make sure that representation is accessible. We've heard a couple of comments about that already from the Government House Leader. One of the things that we have to make sure of – this act is going to facilitate elections for possibly the next two or three elections. As we go about putting those lines on the map today, what we've got to do is kind of look at whether or not they will be fair representative constituencies as we move over this eight- to 10-year period. To do that, what we need to look at is where communities are growing, where communities are not growing as fast, things that come up about where the new economic development initiatives are likely to occur.

I think Fort McMurray has to be really a prime example of that in the sense that the expanding oil sands development up there is very labour intensive. So what we're going to be looking at is that as these new projects come on, there will be a high probability of increases in population in that area. In effect, that constituency probably should start a little bit below the average. Where we look at other constituencies that are going to remain stable, they can be a little above the average.

I would hope that part of the process that the commission looks at is kind of the transition that is going on in Alberta in terms of where changes are occurring, where changes in growth patterns are coming about. The opportunities that are coming up in some of our communities do portray long-term growth, and we should be making sure that we don't end up with the situations like we've had in southwest Calgary. Those constituencies are now unbelievably big because the subdivisions that the city had approved, the subdivisions that were being talked about, hadn't been incorporated into designing the constituencies when we did it two elections ago. So as those subdivisions were developed, we ended up with very high population constituencies in our current election. If the process that we went through previously, two elections ago, would have looked at where subdivision approval had already occurred or was being sought, some of the issues like how cities are growing, then we could have looked at possibly adjusting those boundaries.

I know that in my own area, Mr. Speaker, the city of Lethbridge, historically a lot of our growth has been into the west Lethbridge component, but if we're going to look at where the subdivisions are occurring now, a lot of them are occurring in the southeast corner of the city. So what we should be doing is looking at those subdivision approvals instead of just saying: well, the growth is going to occur in west Lethbridge. It may not now because the city has undertaken some infrastructure development that will really facilitate growth out into the southeast quadrant as well. So we don't want to necessarily

just project a constituency that would say that population growth is going to go where it has historically.

Another thing that we want to look at is that as the committee goes out into the community and talks to Albertans, they'll get a sense of how the communities feel about their representation. Even though it's not written directly into the mandate of the commission, it probably would be very appropriate, as they develop constituencies, to address the issues that the Government House Leader brought up in the sense of: how do we have effective representation? It would be extremely helpful to the Members' Services Committee if they would convey to the Members' Services Committee some of the criteria that they used in determining what constitutes effective representation, accessible representation, because then what we need to do is marry together their analysis, or their thought processes, with a new model of constituency funding from the Members' Services Committee.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to suggest here in any way that this commission take over any of the responsibilities of Members' Services, but what we need to do is make sure that if the commission is using a set of criteria when they look at what is accessible representation, effective representation, then those criteria be included in their report. So when we develop models, then, of actually facilitating the individual who is elected to represent that constituency, we need to provide them with the resources that are consistent with the kinds of parameters that the commission put in place.

What we need to look at also is the approach that comes up with a debate about whether or not we should focus on consistency of constituency or a broad-based constituency. I would suggest that the more diverse we can make the constituencies, the more the representative who is elected from there will have information presented to them that represents the pros and cons on both sides of an issue. If we make a constituency and if we create the boundaries so that we really have a homogeneous community within that constituency, there's no opportunity for the representative to do a little of the balancing that's necessary to have government that represents all Albertans. The individual interest groups, the individual single-issue communities that are there have their opportunities through the structure that we have in terms of input to committees in the Legislature, through input to, say, provincial party platforms, through input to the open consultations that are conducted by the government.

When we're dealing with issue-specific or uniformity-type issues, that should not be a criterion that we look at in terms of trying to put lines on a map. We want to make sure that that line on the map is easy to represent, not easy in the sense that it's an homogeneous issue but easy in the sense that it facilitates gathering of the information and bringing into the debate that goes on here all of the pro and con arguments that are necessary for us to evaluate the aspects of the piece of legislation that deals with that concern. If an individual can hear about all of the issues in their community, they get a chance to feed back to their community members issues that are either important or not important.

In a way, Mr. Speaker, I have that in my community in the sense that Lethbridge is an agriculture service centre as much as a government service centre, you know, in the sense of health care, education, and government support. It's also an agriculture service centre, and being the Agriculture critic I communicate a lot with the interest groups in the community and across Alberta. When I go back to deal with my constituency, which is inside the city of Lethbridge, I can address with them the issues that are important to



the community around them so that we can get a real balance of how things work. If we can make sure that within a constituency there's a diversity of ideas, to me that facilitates good representative government more than having one representative stand up here and speak only on behalf of one constituent group where that constituent group is an issue-based group.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the issues that I think we have to look at and make sure that we're basically able to go through and, when we're done, say that within the boundaries that will be created, what we've got is a degree of the concepts of equality of the individual in a democratic system, but that equality has to be tempered by the ability of the individual to have their information presented in the debate. We also have to look at it, you know, in terms of: can that elected representative actually effectively consult with their community members with the breadth, both in terms of geography and in terms of interest, of all of the members of their constituencies?

In many ways representing a constituency where you have a very broad base of socioeconomic characteristics is just as hard to represent as a community that has a lot of distance characteristics in it. You know, you may have to drive from one end of a constituency to the other and take a couple of hours at it, but when you get there, the message is going to be fairly similar, so there's not a lot of background work that needs to be done. If you're in a more compact, less dispersed constituency, you may end up having to deal with an awful lot more subject matter issues, so the ability to represent them takes just as much effort. So what we need to do is make sure that these kinds of considerations are all part of the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I put them into the record so that when the commission gets established, I hope what they'll do is take the prerogative to read *Hansard*, look at the guidelines that are listed in the act, and listen to some of the discussion that went on here so that they get a full understanding of, I guess, the perceived responsibility that we're passing on to them to make sure that over the next eight to 10 years we have effective representative government established once again in the province. We're fully aware of the discrepancies that are occurring now in some constituencies because of the growth factor and changes in demographics. So I think that on that basis I would like to recognize that the government is introducing this now instead of waiting until the normal guidelines would have come about in the current act. I support that idea that they're moving it forward, getting at it. Let's get this process under way, and let's support this commission so that we can effectively find out where our constituency boundaries will be.

The issue that does come up is the earlier we do it, the longer the constituency will be in place before it gets changed again, so the more important it is that they look at both the forecast and the projected dynamics that may occur so that they effectively establish constituencies that will be just right halfway through the term of the next set of constituencies. In effect, they could be a little unbalanced now, a little bit unbalanced 10 years from now, but in the midpoint they'll be perfect.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we wish the commission well. We put our trust in them, and we'll wait for their results. Thank you very much.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak briefly on Bill 31, and I'll be restricting my comments to the proposed amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. I will try to focus just on one main point, and that is the view of

Alberta New Democrats that some sort of proportional system of representation is required in order to better represent the actual wishes of the people in Alberta.

We appreciate that the government has agreed to permit this debate. It was certainly the position of our caucus that a comprehensive bill dealing with electoral boundaries ought to have been introduced either in this session or in the spring sitting, but I think what's been proposed by the Government House Leader today is a reasonable compromise, and I'm pleased to speak to the bill.

3:40

There are a number of things that we were looking to do which were dealt with by the leader of the New Democrats in his speech last night. They include more balance between rural and urban constituencies, and of course in Alberta we have much wider variances permitted than in a number of other provinces. We think that that could and should be narrowed from a 25 percent variance to something more like a 10 percent variance. That is something that the city of Edmonton has done in its ward system. I participated there on the committee that drew up the ward boundaries. It's certainly a difficult job, and I'm sure it would be a much more difficult job when you're considering the whole province. We were able, as some other provinces are able to do, to get the boundaries such that the population variance did not exceed plus or minus 10 percent. I think we could do that here as well.

We also wanted to address the size of the Assembly and ask the question: do we need all 83 seats in this Assembly? I think there is a strong move towards downsizing government, but I think it generally starts below the legislative level in most governments' practice. So that's something I think we should be discussing as well.

I really want to talk mostly about proportional representation. Certainly if the number of seats in the opposition were based on the proportion of popular vote in the last election, we would see that there would be 31 members of the opposition in the House as opposed to the nine today. For that reason alone, I would expect the government would not favour this proposal, Mr. Speaker, but that, indeed, is how it's conducted. [interjections] Now, I know that this proposition excites some of the hon. members beyond belief, but in fact it is the case that some sort of proportional representation system is the norm in parliamentary democracies in the world, in the western countries in particular, and it's . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: In the civilized world.

MR. MASON: Well the hon. member here says, "In the civilized world," but I believe that Alberta is civilized.

I think it's clear that the type of system we now have tends to perpetuate governments, and it tends to overstate their strength in the Legislative Assembly. This Assembly is a perfect case in point, Mr. Speaker.

In most countries in Europe except Britain proportional representation is the norm. It is, I think, something that can be combined with a system of constituencies such as we currently have. It doesn't have to just be members drawn from a list in direct proportion to their party's popular vote. There is something called a mixed-member system. I believe that it's in practice in Germany and some other countries, Mr. Speaker, in which approximately 75 percent of the seats in the Assembly are allocated to geographic constituencies in the same fashion as we now have. The remaining 25 percent are drawn from a list depending on the popular vote and are allocated so that the total number of the seats in the Assembly approximately equals the popular vote of each of the parties in the

House. So that is something that I think should really be discussed as part of the political future for Alberta. We have a democratic system of which we are rightly proud, Mr. Speaker, but it can always be improved, and it can always be made more democratic.

A recent survey by the Canada West Foundation, hardly a socialist think tank, showed that almost 7 in 10 people in Alberta supported making the electoral system more fair. Electoral reform is on the minds of Canadians, Mr. Speaker. They're no longer satisfied that our system is as democratic and as open as it possibly could be, and you don't have to look any further than some of the proposals that were put out 10 years ago, for example, by the then Reform Party which really engaged Canadians in a big way on the whole question of how decisions are made and how the democratic machinery operated in our country. They talked about recall and talked about referenda and talked about, as the hon. Attorney General and Government House Leader talked about, the triple E Senate, which is an idea whose time has come and gone.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Canadians and particularly western Canadians are intensely interested in the issue of electoral reform, and I think it behooves us to look more broadly at this question than simply, as the government is proposing, having a one-line entry in the miscellaneous statutes act establishing a commission. We certainly are in favour of an early drawing of boundaries, but the government is assuming in its proposal here that Albertans are comfortable and happy with the status quo when it comes to our electoral system, and I think that that's not so, as the Canada West Foundation study clearly shows. Albertans want to see parliamentary reform. They want to see parliamentary change. They want to see electoral reform in this province and indeed right across the country.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude. We would really urge the government to consider during the term of its office establishing a broader commission which would look at the electoral system in Alberta as a whole, with a broader mandate to consider more than just drawing where the lines on the map ought to go. It ought to in our view consult with Albertans as to which type of electoral system they would like to see, what size of provincial Legislature they would like to see, and indeed how the functioning of our Assembly could be made more open to the public and, in a sense, reformed and democratized further. So I would urge the government to consider that proposal sometime during the term of its mandate.

In the meantime I would wish the commission the best of luck in drawing up fair boundaries that will serve Albertans as well as they have so far. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly enjoy the opportunity to speak to the electoral boundaries component of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. I think this is integral to democracy in Alberta, and I would certainly like to hear the comments of all members of this Assembly as to how we as an elected legislative body could represent all the constituents of Alberta to the best possible degree.

Certainly one of the objectives of this particular amendment act is to change the date, and we are changing the date when the commission must be appointed to June 30, 2002, instead of the proposed date of July 1, 2003. Certainly I welcome this suggestion, support this suggestion because it is with this redistribution of the constituencies that we will have, hopefully, better representation.

3:50

Now, we do know, Mr. Speaker, that an election is a fundamental component of representative government. It provides effective representation from the population, and in Alberta the foundation of this process is made up of the 83 electoral divisions. When we have elections, we do it on the basis of one vote for one person. In assuming that, we assume that every Albertan's vote is equal to any other Albertan's vote, but unfortunately that is not the case. I only have to look at the results from the last list of electors in the last election. When we compare, for example, the constituency of Athabasca-Wabasca and the number of names on their election list, as of May 2001 at 12,598, and we look at the names on the electors list for Calgary-Shaw, as of the same date at 49,380, then we have quite a disparity.

We also have to look at this. For the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to drive from the southern end of his constituency to the northern part of his constituency, he does have quite a chore. [interjection] He does indicate that he sometimes requires a dog team, and if he'd like somebody to accompany him on one of those trips, I'd be most willing to, yes.

This in itself, Mr. Speaker, does pose some of the problems that we do have and the challenges that will be facing the commission when they do look at this whole issue of redistribution. Certainly in some parts of the province we have regions where there's a very sparse population. In order for those people to have the same representation as, for example, people in Calgary-Shaw, then how does this member travel throughout his constituency? At the same time, how do we address the issue that there was roughly a 3.9 to 1 ratio of voters in Calgary-Shaw to those in Athabasca-Wabasca? These are challenges that the commission will once again face when they do their redistribution.

Certainly our boundaries are going to be determined by population. It is going to be determined by area. I think that somehow, Mr. Speaker, the commission will have to look at ways that we can address these problems. In the case of Athabasca-Wabasca, one of the solutions, perhaps, could be to make an allowance where this constituency could be provided with more funds so that there could be more offices in different areas and to have those offices staffed. As well, you know, I think the commission faces enormous challenges when we look, for example, at the rapid growth in Calgary and how some of these constituencies were determined in – I believe the last time was 1996. They have grown incredibly since that time and certainly do not follow along the recommendation that we look at these and review how we address redistribution every second election here in Alberta.

Now, then, we also have, when we look at elections here in Alberta, a deviation figure, and this deviation figure certainly is quite large when compared with other provinces. I see that section 17(1) allows the population of a proposed electoral division to be as much as 25 percent above or below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions. This is quite high, but again to maintain the number of electoral divisions at 83, perhaps this figure could not be altered too much. Now, also, in section 17(2) it allows up to four of the proposed electoral divisions to have a population that is as much as 50 percent below the average if the commission is of the opinion that at least three of the five criteria apply to that proposed electoral division.

I guess this brings us back, Mr. Speaker, to the issue: what is the average, and how is that determined? It seems to be an increasing difficulty that the commission will face, because we have seen certainly a greater move to urbanization of the province over the last decade, and there doesn't seem to be much of a trend to get away from this.

So those are a few comments that I wanted to make in regards to this particular Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act.

I also would wish the commission every success in addressing the challenges that all members who have spoken so far have outlined, and I certainly think that with their good work all Albertans will be well represented.

I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak today.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to make a few comments about Bill 31 and in particular the electoral boundaries component. It seems to me that we can look at and have traditionally looked at representation from two perspectives. The first perspective is a delegate model of representation, where citizens send people to this Legislature as their delegates and expect that the representative, the MLA, will reflect their wishes in his or her behaviour in this Assembly and in the way they deal with matters. We spend a great deal of time as MLAs under that model trying to be good delegates. We hold town halls, we send out questionnaires and opinionnaires, and we monitor carefully the kinds of telephone calls that we get and the e-mails that we receive. We log them, and we keep track of public opinion. We watch local newspapers for what's being said, and we try to keep our antennae tuned in to what the community is saying in order that we can in this Assembly try to reflect those wishes in our behaviour.

There's a second model, however, and that's a trustee model. There's been very little attention paid in any of the reviews that we've had to a trustee model and, I guess, with good reason. A trustee model of representation is one where we would be acting more on our own convictions and attempting to put forward principles that we believe in and act on them regardless of current popular opinion, and that's what makes the model very, very difficult for the context in which we work, where a delegate model is the norm. I said that it's a difficult model, and we've seen a couple of examples in the House this last week where MLAs were acting more in tune with the trustee model than the delegate model.

4:00

We saw it when the Minister of Finance and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke in opposition to I think it was Bill 207, the tool tax exemption. The tool tax exemption is obviously a popular notion in the community and has widespread support, yet we heard the Minister of Finance and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview saying: "Just a minute. It may be the popular thing to do, but is it really sound policy at this time?" They went on to indicate a position that was quite different, that paid attention to the economics of the proposal and paid attention to what it meant for the tax system if that bill were proceeded with. I'm sure that it wasn't easy for them to stand and to take that position. So a trustee model makes it much more difficult. It also means that members have to have thought through very carefully their own philosophical and political stances and be ready to defend them.

It's apparent that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has in the past done everything they can to further a delegate model of representation. It's highly weighted in favour of a delegate model. They've made some improvements, but again they were done to, as I said, improve that delegate model. The last commission put forward a rather interesting matrix. They took six factors and tried to assign a numerical weight to each of those factors and then to come to a total that ranked the constituencies in the province in terms of how difficult it was for the member to represent them. Those factors have already been mentioned: the geographic area, the

population that the constituency contains, the density of the population, the number of households, the number of elected bodies that have interests in the constituency, and the distance of the constituency points from the Legislature.

It was an interesting exercise and one that I think was long overdue to try to bring together some quantitative analysis to the decisions about the making of electoral boundaries. I found it interesting, for instance, that Edmonton-Mill Woods under that model is the easiest constituency in the province to represent. You can cross my constituency in five minutes if you're driving slowly. In terms of the number of organizations that we have to deal with, they are ones that other MLAs in the city also have to deal with. So it resulted in a ranking of constituencies from the easiest to serve to the most difficult and, I think, was an attempt to provide a rationale for the work of the commission.

They also indicated that they could have looked at some other variables and added to the model. That was the number of communities that could only be reached by air, for instance. They didn't include that. They could have looked at the number of special interest groups that a constituency has. These are concentrated in some areas with respect to interest groups that have concerns with water or interest groups that are concerned with agriculture or livestock and interest groups that are concerned with the environment, but they rejected additional variables, indicating that they thought it would add clutter to the model that they had presented. It's something that I hope the new boundaries commission will re-examine, that they'll look at that matrix and might consider adding more variables to it, because I think it takes us past the one person, one vote argument that has so often bogged down electoral boundary reform and brings to it a wisdom and dimension that I think are sorely needed.

The easiest model, of course, would be to look at a trustee model, and then it wouldn't matter. As long as they're roughly close, I suspect, in terms of population, people would be happy. But given the direction that we've taken in the past and what seems to be popular interest in fairness with electoral boundaries, I suspect it's something that's not going to happen.

I'm pleased that the commission is going to undertake the work, and as other members have indicated, I'll await with interest the results. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aw.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, the rest of the members should've clearly listened to what their House leader was telling them about the deal for this afternoon.

I am pleased to be able to rise and speak to one particular section of Bill 31, which is the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001. The agreement was that although there isn't usually a debate around miscellaneous statutes, members of the opposition, of course, could speak for up to 20 minutes on the miscellaneous statute dealing with moving up the date for the establishment of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

A number of other people have already spoken on the need for this commission to be charged with being fair and equal. The Government House Leader and Minister of Justice had also urged us to try and stick to the point being put forward in the miscellaneous statute, and that is that, in fact, we'd be looking at an earlier date to establish the Electoral Boundaries Commission rather than waiting

until the legislated time of 2003. This would allow us to establish the commission by June of 2002, thereby giving us more time to look at electoral boundaries and prepare for any changes that might come prior to the next election.

I think that in Alberta there is a great need to address the perception of fairness and of equality. It's fairly well known that the votes are not equal here. A vote in one riding is not equal to a vote in another riding. We have a disparity of more than two, so in some ridings a vote is worth more than two votes compared to a vote in another riding. When we are looking at an increasing suspicion from voters or even an apathy and unwillingness for them to participate in an electoral system, things like perceived fairness and equality become even more important. If they don't believe that their vote is going to count for anything, it's very difficult to encourage them to vote. As I said, we do have between a 25 and a 50 percent deviation here.

An earlier date for establishing the Electoral Boundaries Commission allows for consideration of a number of things, obviously the number of ridings. I think there's a good argument to look at having fewer ridings and therefore having a larger population base that each MLA is responsible for representing, and I'll come to why.

4:10

Part of what this earlier date is allowing the commission to look at is the criteria for determining the number of ridings, and we've got a lot of things in that mix, the traditional considerations, or the geographic size of the riding and the population. Now we have come to look at percentage of deviation, which was certainly the consideration in the '95-96 boundary commission, and that commission also started to look at other complexities of representation. As a matter of fact, in their press release at the release of the commission report they talk about "a conceptual model to objectively measure the degree of difficulty each member for an electoral division encounters in representing his or her electoral division." It is a degree of difficulty, and there are differing difficulties in different ridings.

Part of what the last boundaries commission looked at was a matrix. They chose 10 quantitative considerations for qualities matching criteria set out directly or indirectly in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and then they quantified this to numbers, and they worked it out in a whole mathematical scheme.

So I think that by establishing an earlier date for the commission to come together, we're allowing the commission to have more time to consider those complexities. I hope they do, because it is a time of more complexity.

They had looked at things in the past, as mentioned by the House leader when he introduced this miscellaneous statute for debate: the distance to travel, the time or distance to cross the riding. Some of those have already been considered. I've heard my rural colleagues comment on how difficult it is to represent ridings that have more than a couple of towns of equal size. I agree. That probably is difficult. I can counter with saying: yes, and I likely have to spend an equal amount of time dealing with different business revitalization zones and different organizations like that that require time and attention and their own political ability to manage and lead in their communities. So I'm only dealing with one city hall but four business revitalization zones, probably comparable on a matrix to someone trying to deal with four towns of more or less equal size.

I think we have to look at the balancing of interest between the complexities of representing rural ridings and balancing the interest between the rural centres and constituents who really are out in the country, farming activity, oil and gas activity. On a matrix what would be equivalent for me to be looking at? Probably the number

of different ethnic and language groups in the riding, perhaps the number of community leagues or nonprofits and charities that are in my riding and are all expecting time and attention from me. Of course, I think we need to be looking at the challenges that are presented by different levels of income, wealth and poverty, in areas, because that certainly affects your ability to represent, to make yourself available to people.

An earlier date for this commission to start to meet allows for consideration of other criteria. We have the issue spoken briefly about by one of my colleagues of predictable changes in population. We have some areas in rural Alberta who are losing population, others who are gaining population. The same thing in my riding. There has been a tremendous amount of infill housing, for example. We've had a change of about 5,000 constituents in the last couple of years with infill housing. That was predictable. When you looked at the plans from the city of Edmonton and the designed ARPs, area redevelopment plans, that was predictable, and it could have been anticipated that there was going to be an increase in that riding. So hopefully with the additional time this commission will be able to look at how to better plan for those changes of population.

Balancing that are also changes in technology. There is still a desire from some constituents, certainly, to meet face to face, but increasingly I think constituents are making use of technological advances like e-mail and computers. They're very happy to correspond certainly with me by e-mail. They don't want to come in and see me; they want to correspond by e-mail. It's fast, and they have a written version of something. That's how they want to do it. There's also technology like videoconferencing and 1-800 numbers. All of that helps us to be more accessible and available to our constituents. Certainly computers I think have made a huge difference in my riding.

We're also needing to look at issues of urban sprawl and, as I mentioned, urban infill plans. I think it is quite possible, and I would certainly encourage members of the commission to look at reducing the number of MLAs in the Alberta Legislature and having us work with . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: How many? What's the number?

MS BLAKEMAN: I don't know. That's the job of the commission, to look at that and figure it out.

Certainly in my discussions with representatives in other provinces – I mean, in BC they're representing 75,000 people in a riding, and they didn't seem the least bit flapped by it. I spent some time talking to different representatives there to find out how they were doing it. You know, they had more staff in their offices. They made better use of things like long-distance telephone lines; travel, aside from them driving themselves in their own cars, better access to travel across the province. It was certainly doable. So maybe what needs to happen out of this are recommendations from the commission to, I guess, Members' Services Committee to have a look at what's possible in constituency budgets. So you're reducing the number of MLAs in total but increasing the constituency budgets to allow people to hire more staff or take advantage of technological advances that would allow them to serve more people.

So I think there are lots of possibilities. Certainly as a member of the opposition in Alberta I approach this with trepidation. I trust and I know that the system is set up to make sure that this is a fair process, that there is no gerrymandering. Certainly there are fears about that; I'm not going to pretend there aren't. We've already gone through a process here in Alberta where the boundaries that were chosen were considered inappropriate under the court system and there was a request to re-examine it. In fact, that happened.

That was the '95-96 Electoral Boundaries Commission, and we've got their report here to look at. They're the ones that have come up with a number of these variables and how they approached it with a mathematical precision in trying to be fair.

So I'm willing to support the earlier date to establish the commission. I think that's important. I certainly wish them the best of luck, and I urge them to look forward. We're setting this for the next 10 years. I think technology will be very important. I encourage them to take all possibilities into consideration.

I know there are others following me waiting to speak, so I won't belabour the point at all. I hope that if the commission has an opportunity to read this and understand why we were supporting the earlier date, they're able to take advantage of the concerns and the hopes and the desires that I'm putting forward.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

4:20

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my voice to the number of hon. members of this Assembly who have expressed an interest in the boundaries commission getting an early start on their work. Certainly I would like to see, in my view, an eraser taken to the entire electoral map and the process of the election.

Alberta, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly, has had a rather unique tradition and proud past as far as proportional representation goes – and I will discuss this in a minute – but one has to be very, very careful with each constituency. I would like to see 65 constituencies. I think we have far, far too many MLAs in this province. I think we could get by with 65. I don't think we need this number of constituencies with telecommunications the way they are today, Mr. Speaker, with the fax machine. We even have the RITE line. It's just not necessary. Other provinces, certainly Ontario comes to mind where I understand they have exactly – I could be wrong on this – the same number of MPPs as MPs they elect to Ottawa, or if it's not precisely the same number, it's within one or two.

Now, the gerrymandering that can occur is a reality. In the last redistribution 10 polls in the Bonnie Doon area were moved from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They were moved. People asked me: why are we no longer in the constituency? Well, historically there was a large number of Liberal votes collected in those polls, and suddenly they were moved, Mr. Speaker. It was to give the Conservative candidate in this case a better chance of winning. The constituency was reduced.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I think there's a great deal of latitude being allowed in debate this afternoon, and by agreement I'm not concerned with the latitude or the fact that much of the debate isn't directly relevant to the section of the act being amended. But I think it goes way too far for the hon. member to suggest that this House in previous years, in passing the act which created the electoral boundaries, did so in a manner to gerrymander, I think was the term that he used, or in fact to take Liberal voters out of one constituency and put them into another constituency. That really is an affront to all members of the House at that time, and I think that by inference that's reprehensible to the members of this House.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. I would refer the Government House Leader to the judgment of the Alberta Court of Appeal that was delivered on October 24, 1994, where the court was very critical of the electoral divisions that had been established, claiming that the very brief report of the select committee had offered no detailed explanation for the specific boundaries. So I would state that this member is completely within his mandate to be making the claims that he is.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, suggestions that decisions made outside of this Assembly would come under some veil of electoral irregularity are rather serious statements, and one would only hope that one who makes such statements would be doing more than providing opinion with respect to such statements and actually be in a position to back them up. Now, the chair, to his knowledge, is unaware of any statement by anyone, any court decision or any other statement outside of this Assembly ever, to suggest that there has been voting irregularity in the province of Alberta.

Certainly there is an independent officer appointed by this Assembly responsible to this Assembly called the Chief Electoral Officer, there's an all-party committee that supervises the work of the Chief Electoral Officer, and all reports of the Chief Electoral Officer are in fact filed in this Assembly, as is the work of the Chief Electoral Officer. To the chair's knowledge never once has there ever been a suggestion made by the Chief Electoral Officer that in fact such events have occurred.

So might I just ask for caution by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with respect to certain comments?

### **Debate Continued**

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Precisely, the fact is that there were 10 polls that were removed after the 1993 election, 10 polls west of Connors Road.

AN HON. MEMBER: Don't go there.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm sorry. Every hon. member can look up the election results and count the number of votes that each respective party got in that election. That is just a fact, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Now, getting to my . . .

### **Speaker's Ruling Improper Inferences**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please, please. I mean, there's no advantage, hon. member. This particular chair has had three different constituencies in seven elections. In fact, at the time the hon. member was talking about, I think that this particular Speaker had probably 30 polls changed from one constituency to the next. This particular candidate at the time had to deal with the cards given to him. Never once did anybody come to this particular candidate and ask him: well, would you like to get rid of those 30 and get these 30? No, I don't think so. We all marched according to the documents given to us.

That's why I say: please, let's be cautious in our statements in here. Do we want the Chief Electoral Officer or somebody else to start sending letters to the Legislative Assembly lambasting an individual member of the Assembly for his statements in the Assembly? That will happen, but we don't need it.

### **Debate Continued**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between the 1924 election, the Edmonton by-election, and the 1955 provincial general

election this province, I would like to remind all hon. members, adopted a relatively complex and unusual system of both preferential and proportional voting. It's not that long ago. It's only two generations ago in this province that we had proportional voting. All constituencies except for Edmonton and Calgary were single-member constituencies. In single-member ridings electors marked their ballots in order of preference, and if no candidate received a majority of votes cast as the first preference of the electorate, the bottom candidate in the field was dropped.

MRS. NELSON: So what? Who cares?

MR. MacDONALD: Now, the hon. member says: "So what? Who cares?"

There was a system before in this Assembly of proportional representation. Not only would I like to see the boundaries commission look at different boundaries – that's fine – but also look at different ways of selecting members for this honourable Assembly. I see no problem with this. If you look at the makeup of the Assembly, there was Social Credit, there were Independents, there were Liberals in this time period, there were Veterans, and there were members of the Labour Party. They were all elected. I look at the election results from the vote last winter. You see that there is the Alberta First Party, the Alberta Greens. What I'm saying is that perhaps if there were a larger number of political parties represented in the Assembly, we would have a better government. There would be more voices heard. Why should not the Social Credit, if they get a certain percentage of the vote, be allowed a voice in this Assembly? Why should not the Alberta First Party be allowed, if they get a certain percentage of the vote, at least one voice in this Assembly? The Alberta Greens: if they get a certain percentage of the vote, why should they not be able to send someone to this Assembly? I think we would have a much better Assembly.

4:30

Now, we had in this province, Mr. Speaker, incredibly at one time, between 1959 and 1963 – and I'm sure this is going to please some people in the province – no recognized Official Opposition leader, but we do now fortunately. If these parties were in the Official Opposition or members of the opposition benches, I don't see what harm that would do. It would strengthen democracy, and this is what we need to take a look at. It's been part of our history in the past.

I think in conclusion I would again like to remind all hon. members that such systems of proportional and preferential balloting were relatively popular here in western Canada in the 1920s and again in the 1930s, but few other jurisdictions retained these methods of selecting representatives as long as Alberta did or applied them so broadly. Many political scientists, Mr. Speaker, generally agree that the popularity of both preferential and transferable ballots is connected to the widespread distrust in western Canada of the power of political parties. So perhaps we could lessen this distrust if there were more parties with representatives in this Assembly. The political history of Alberta is full of many individuals, stirring campaigns, and interesting experiments in democracy.

I think that at this time it is an excellent opportunity to have a look at preferential voting. It is used in many European jurisdictions. The first one that would come to mind, Mr. Speaker, is Switzerland. If this committee would have a look at this system of electing hon. members to the Assembly, I would suggest that in the time that we're allowing it, the extra year we are allowing it to do its work, it perhaps should entertain a complete change to how we select members to this Assembly, and we should select less members to this Assembly.

Thank you.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just make a couple of comments, and then I'll sit down. I know probably most people don't want to listen to any discussion on electoral boundaries. At least people in my constituency have never once brought up the issue between the times that the boundaries are reviewed. It seems like the only time we'd get into the comments that keep coming back every once in a while is when we have the opportunity to even mention electoral boundary reviews. I think it's worth noting that not everyone has the same point of view, and the ones that always seem to object to the boundaries being redrawn or making accusations that they're falsely drawn are those that don't have the majority in this House.

I know for instance, Mr. Speaker, when I first became elected in a by-election, we had had one of the longest serving MLAs in Little Bow for quite a number of years, and the previous member talked about how there needed to be more parties. Well, if my memory is correct, my former MLA served probably in no less than four. One he created himself; one was one of the old original governing parties, the Social Credit; also the Independent Party; and then he saw the light, apparently, in about 1989 and crossed the floor, I believe it's called, and sat as a member of the government. Following that time, of course, he went on to other things.

When I became elected, our constituency was about half the size of what it is today geographically. I find it interesting and I get a little bit upset, maybe not a little bit – I get awfully mad – when people suggest that there should be fewer MLAs and that they have a hardship dealing with special interest groups in a city two blocks from this very Legislature Building.

I would like to remind a lot of people here, maybe even some of my own city colleagues, that my riding is probably, give or take, the seventh or eighth largest in the province, but it's not big compared to my hon. colleagues from Highwood or Livingstone-Macleod, from Cardston-Taber-Warner or Drumheller-Chinook, from Strathmore-Brooks. They're all about the same, but actually when you look at it in terms of the overall province, they're quite gigantic, because it covers off an area basically from Airdrie south to the American border and from Saskatchewan over to B.C.

I found it interesting at the last electoral boundary review – and if anyone ever felt that some of the information in the backgrounders to that was contrived by us, it definitely wasn't. They had indices of the things that affected effective representation for an MLA, things like the number of elected boards that each of us represents, the number of municipalities, of local governments. I was quite amazed that with the small population my riding has in comparison to Calgary-Shaw and some of the larger ones in Edmonton and Calgary – when you factored in all the various elected boards that I was charged with helping to represent, the distance, the number of miles – other than my colleague from Athabasca-Wabasca my riding was apparently the second hardest to represent in this entire province. I didn't really think too much of it. I just thought that was part of the job. I didn't really get in a fit about whether or not I had 5,000 more or less than somebody in a city riding. I just thought it was kind of normal that a lot of people would expect to have to travel and drive like I do 13 weeks out of every year, to cover the mileage that I put on the truck. Thirteen weeks: that's a quarter of the year.

That's really amazing to a lot of the grade 6 students, which I know, Mr. Speaker, you'd appreciate. Many of us go to the social studies classes where they study federal and provincial and municipal governments, and they want to know what we do, because they think that all of us fly around in a jet from here to there. They are really amazed that we sit here as often as we do and that many of us have to travel five hours one way to get back home.

So I wanted to add those comments, not that it's going to make

any difference to some people's minds. Just the fact that if anything needs changing, maybe it's the whole legislation that requires us to review these boundaries after every second general election. I've never yet had one constituent in Little Bow ask us to change the boundaries. It never comes up. And if there is a piece of legislation that needs to be changed, this is it. Maybe we could rescind it.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

4:40

head: Royal Assent

MRS. MCCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[Mrs. McClellan and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois Hole, CM, and Mrs. McClellan entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

THE CLERK: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 16 School Amendment Act, 2001
- 18 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001
- 21 Electronic Transactions Act
- 22 Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001
- 23 Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001
- 24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001
- 25 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act
- 26 Trustee Amendment Act, 2001
- 27 Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001
- 28 Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001
- 29 Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001
- 30 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2)
- 31 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)
- 207 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, 2001
- 208 Alberta Official Song Act
- 209 Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated her assent]

THE CLERK: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. McClellan left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as we await the return of the hon. Deputy Premier, let me just make several comments, and the pages will continue the work that they have to do.

First of all, let me congratulate all of you on the excellent work that was done in the calendar year 2001. I think the hon. Government House Leader was a bit modest earlier this afternoon when responding to the question from the Official Opposition House Leader as to the order of business for next week. The hon. Government House Leader basically said: well, the Order Paper for the first time in a long time is actually empty. In my memory I don't ever recall when the Assembly actually rose on the last day of session with an empty Order Paper. The table officers and I had a discussion, and we're going to undertake some historical research to see exactly how many times this has actually occurred in the Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta since 1905. Such an accomplishment is absolutely unique, and of course it comes as a result of excellent leadership by the House leaders on the government side and excellent co-operation from the opposition House leaders. You cannot accomplish this without the two working together.

I might also point out that with the three additional private members' bills that were approved here yesterday, we now have arrived at 25 private members' bills which have received third reading in the province of Alberta since 1993. To my knowledge there's probably not one parliament anywhere in the world that can say one or two in the last eight years. This one can say 25. That makes it very, very unique.

Today we had another historical first. This has never happened before in the history of this Legislative Assembly, going back to 1905. For the first time in our history – hopefully, as well, it'll be the last time in the history of our Assembly – today an hon. member rose, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, and actually introduced guests who were listening via the Internet. That is unique, and I repeat: I hope that will be the first and the last time in the history of this Assembly in this province that that actually is going to happen.

If all of the hon. members go back one year from now, at this time in the year 2000 some members were tired and in anticipation of an upcoming, quote, provincial election. Some members were tired and nervous about an upcoming provincial election. Some people in this Assembly today were not members of this Assembly and were out wherever it was trying to organize, plan, create something for a provincial election. Since that time, you hon. members have had little time for rest. This has been a fast, fast moving 12 months. Quite frankly, it has been nonstop when you consider the events of last fall, the events of January, the events of February, the events of March, the events of April, and right through the whole thing. I ask you one thing: get some rest.

In the last few days I have been looking at all these agenda that various caucuses are setting aside for their various members for meetings in the month of December and the month of January and the month of February. There's no rule, there's no law in Alberta that Members of the Legislative Assembly must work 12 and 14 hours a day, seven days of the week, 52 weeks of the year. That's not a law; that's not a rule. That's a thing that you create for yourselves. I strongly ask you to consider that after these last 12

months you need to get some rest, and you need to get some time for yourselves. So please take advantage of that.

As the hon. Deputy Premier returns to the House, may I wish all of you the best for peace, health, joy, and family in this upcoming season.

The hon. Government House Leader.

4:50

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I take the

opportunity to wish all members of this Assembly a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and ask that we all take your advice to heart and in so doing move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn pursuant to Government Motion 16 agreed to April 24, 2001.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 16 the Assembly adjourned at 4:51 p.m.]