

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 16, 1994 1:30 p.m.**

Date: 94/02/16

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: 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.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly His Excellency Karoly Gedai, the ambassador of the republic of Hungary to Canada. Mr. Gedai, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery, is accompanied by his wife along with Mr. Bela Balaz, the honorary Hungarian consul based in Calgary, as well as Mrs. Balaz.

Since Hungary has become a democracy and introduced market reforms, trade and investment between Alberta and Hungary continue to grow and to prosper. Alberta Hungary trade has increased in recent years mainly through the sale of Alberta equipment and products to Hungary. We'd also welcome the increased two-way trade and increased Hungarian imports to our province. A number of Alberta companies are currently active in Hungary, including ATCO, with the manufacturing of trailers; Nova, with Alberta pipeline projects; and Rebound Rig and Stabeco Industries, with the sale of oil and gas equipment. Alberta's relations with Hungary also include scientific co-operation in the areas of technology transfer projects, biotechnology, combustion technologies, and agriculture.

The strong relationship Alberta shares with Hungary is due in large part to the efforts of a very active and dedicated Hungarian community within our province, which I understand now numbers about 20,000 individuals.

As well, Mr. Bela Balaz, the Hungarian honorary consul based in Calgary, represents Hungary most capably within our province. It should be mentioned that the province of Alberta has its own representation in Hungary with Dr. George Adorjany as the Alberta trade representative based in Budapest since 1992.

I would ask His Excellency along with those accompanying him to now rise in the Speaker's gallery to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 3

Natural Gas Marketing Amendment Act, 1994

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Natural Gas Marketing Amendment Act, 1994.

The purpose of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is to provide authorization for a penalty system designed to provide an incentive for accurate and timely reporting of information required in determining the gas reference price for natural gas. The Bill also extends the limitation period for prosecution of offences under the Act from six months to 36 months in order to provide sufficient time within which to detect offences. The Bill also confirms that

officers of a corporation remain liable for prosecution for an offence even though a prosecution has not been commenced against the corporation itself.

[Leave granted; Bill 3 read a first time]

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

Bill 6

Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 1994

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 1994.

This Bill makes three broad changes: one, to clarify ownership and facilitate disposition of underground storage rights to provide uniformity and certainty in the development of new underground storage facilities; two, to implement changes in the natural gas royalty collection system agreed to by industry and government; and three, to repeal some administrative requirements for the registration of Crown minerals agreement transfers and to allow updating of application of payment rules.

[Leave granted; Bill 6 read a first time]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I would move that both the preceding Bills, number 3 and number 6, now be placed on the Order Paper as government Bills.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file with the Assembly today the Labour Force Statistics for January 1994.

I'd also like to table responses to motions for returns 162 and 163.

As well, pursuant to section 22 of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act I'd like to table the 1992-1993 annual report of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, a copy of which will be distributed to all members.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table two documents, the first being the Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey dated February 1994. The survey sets out how small business in Alberta deems the economy to go this coming year.

Secondly, with your leave, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce the monthly economic review statistics from the Economic Development and Tourism department, which show the loss of jobs in rural Alberta in 1993.

Thank you, sir.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I wish to file with the Assembly the interim response to the Auditor General's report for the year ended March 31, 1993.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it's my pleasure to table with the Assembly four copies of the AADAC 1992-93 annual report and the AADAC report entitled Alcohol and Drugs in Alberta. A copy of these two reports were previously distributed to all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, today I wish to table six copies of the proceedings from the Invitational Forum on Student Conduct and Violence in Schools held in Edmonton on November 19 and 20 of last year.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. ROSTAD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two people visiting us from the state of Washington, two grade 11 students who are on an exchange through the Kiwanis Club in Wetaskiwin. They're accompanied by Cpl. Grant Clark of the RCMP in Wetaskiwin and by two host students. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask the five of them to stand and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very honoured to have the pleasure to introduce a very special person who's made a very valued contribution to this province. His contribution has been more than just to his constituents and to his constituency but to agriculture, to all aspects of the growth of this province. For the many years of his life that he devoted to participate in this House and for the valued contribution and the true friend of agriculture that he has established, it's my pleasure and honour to introduce to the House Ernie Isley, my predecessor. I'd ask him to rise and receive a warm welcome.

head: **Oral Question Period**

1:40

Job Creation

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has spoken glowingly about Alberta's economic future, but the people on the front line – that is, small business entrepreneurs in Alberta – who do most of the hiring do not share the Premier's optimism. A Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey – and that's the document I filed today – shows that nearly 80 percent of small businesses in Alberta will either not hire or will in fact lay people off this year. My first question to the Premier, then, is this: why is the Premier's rosy vision of Alberta's economy so different from the people who are on the frontline?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can only present to the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition the document that was filed by the hon. Deputy Premier just a few moments ago, the Labour Force Statistics to January of 1994, which gives a clear indication that economic growth in this province is indeed taking place, that by having a very reasonable royalty regime, we were able to stimulate a number of jobs in the oil and gas sector, that by having a reasonable and very, very competitive tax regime and no sales tax, we are able to attract new businesses here and have those businesses create or contribute legitimately to Alberta's wealth and prosperity. The hon. leader of the Liberal Party can have his reports and his comments. I have four or five pages of quotes from some of the most highly respected economists in the world saying that this province is on the right track and we are doing the right thing.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, it's small business that does almost all of the job creation in this province. This is a real document,

Mr. Premier. If small business entrepreneurs say that they're not going to hire, who is going to be doing the hiring?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition has said is diametrically opposite to what Brad Wright of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says. He says quite positively relative to the government's plan: it's positive, it reflects planning, and there are going to be targeted spending requirements for every department. What he is saying basically is that we are doing the right thing by getting our spending under control and at the same time maintaining the most competitive tax position in Canada to attract new people here with new dollars to create new jobs and contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of this province.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this Assembly the majority of the members of the Legislature passed a motion and in fact set history, accepting a Liberal motion that the government come forward with a job-creation strategy, a program. I'd like the Premier to tell Albertans what the specifics are, what he's going to do to bring forward this job-creation strategy.

MR. KLEIN: Fundamentally, there will be a number of documents, of course, prepared and tabled over a period of time relative to specific programs. The one thing that we won't be doing is – we're certainly getting out of the business of being in business. We are generally going to attract new jobs and new economic growth and prosperity through having a very competitive tax regime and by getting our own spending under control, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Well, if the member opposite wants to talk about petitions – and I see that they've been filing a lot of petitions. Mr. Speaker . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Order. Second main question.

MR. DECORE: It's clear, Mr. Speaker, from the nonanswer the Premier gave that he wasn't even aware the motion was passed yesterday. In fact, he just asked his colleague: what motion; what motion?

Corporate Taxes

MR. DECORE: Well, let's try another set of questions, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has accused the opposition of preaching doom and gloom.

MR. KLEIN: Right.

MR. DECORE: And he says, "Right."

Let's see, Mr. Premier, how you react to some positive suggestions from the Liberal Party.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Make sure the real Premier hears.

MR. DECORE: We're asking the real Premier now; that's true. It's you, sir, the real Premier. Will the Premier accept the Liberal suggestion that the corporate tax on small businesses be reduced from 6 percent to 4 percent now?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've often said that if the Liberals have any good suggestions, just send them over, because they won't be able to use them for another four years at least. So just send them all over. Send the suggestions over, and we will consider them.

I do wonder, Mr. Speaker, why the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition didn't appear before the Tax Reform Commission with this great idea. You know, they wanted to hear from all Albertans relative to . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Answer the question.

MR. KLEIN: The answer is: send it over and we'll take it under consideration.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I didn't want the Premier to pawn this off or slough it off. I want the Premier to answer. Will you agree to reduce the tax from 6 percent to 4 percent, yes or no?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the last time I looked and as I look around this caucus, we're the government, Mr. Speaker, not those guys.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, if you're asking us for positive suggestions, you should learn how to be positive too.

Well, let's try another one, Mr. Speaker. Is the Premier prepared to lighten the load on small business by lobbying the federal government, like we are now, to raise the GST exemption from \$30,000 to \$50,000 on small businesses?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we've taken it a step further. We are on record as a government of opposing altogether GST, unlike these people who like the idea of a sales tax.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the last time I looked at the history, it was a Conservative government that imposed the GST.

Rural Economy

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, my last set of questions. Rural Alberta is hurting as well. Your own employment statistics, Mr. Premier, show that in 1993 10,000 jobs were lost in the Alberta agricultural sector. The government has forgotten about rural Alberta. This government's rural strategy isn't working and neither are rural Albertans. I'd like the Premier to explain the loss of 10,000 jobs in agricultural Alberta.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the program that we have prepared, again, is an economic recovery program that hopefully will provide the opportunity for the private sector to stimulate the agricultural economy as well as every other economic sector in this province. There have been some good things happening in agriculture, certainly with respect to beef, certainly with respect to canola. We see an industry that was almost devastated in the Falher-Donnelly-Girouxville area, and that was the industry of beekeeping. Because of this government's efforts and the efforts of the former minister of agriculture, we are now able to get queen bees out of Hawaii to restore those stocks, and we expect to see some real growth in that activity in that particular area. There are examples of, I think, a very strong comeback in the agricultural sector. I would like the minister of agriculture to supplement.

1:50

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Last November we brought forward Bill 21, which the opposition Liberals opposed vehemently. Part of Bill 21 was to allow for rural Alberta to invest in itself. Part of Bill 21 was to allow for rural Alberta to rebuild itself and to participate in that process, not to have others come in and tell rural Alberta what to do but to allow rural Alberta to develop its own strategy and its own process. The

Liberals, who today are criticizing our Premier for the efforts that he brought forward, who today stand and rise in this House and criticize the fact that rural Alberta is not prospering, are totally out of line.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, this is the document that shows that 10,000 jobs were lost in agricultural Alberta. I didn't want a lecture about the birds and the bees; I wanted to know why this has happened. Tell us why this has happened, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are going to be dips and dives and there are going to be peaks and valleys in all sectors of the economy. It is so typical of the Liberal Party to pick out the gloom, the doom, the misery. If he wants to talk about job losses – and, as I said, we're trying to recover in that area, and we're putting in programs to achieve that recovery – sectors showing tremendous gains were retail trade 12,000, oil and gas 10,100, wholesale trade 9,600, construction 6,600.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, may I supplement the matter on jobs? The statistics that the Leader of the Opposition brings forward from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business suggest that he has not informed the House . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Supplementary Responses

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Hon. members, it's customary in this House that ministers can augment the answers of other ministers.

Rural Economy (continued)

MR. DINNING: In fact, Mr. Speaker, the CFIB has indicated that two-thirds of the firms they talked with said that they were going to remain at present levels of employment, that 20 percent of the firms were either going to rehire laid-off employees or hire new employees. So for the hon. Leader of the Opposition to do what he did and mislead the house, I think, is a dreadful state of affairs.

MR. DECORE: I can't believe . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

MR. DECORE: Well, he was just adding to the birds and the bees and the flora and the fauna.

Mr. Speaker, this document – and I want to wave it again for the Premier to see it – says that 10,000 people in rural Alberta lost employment, and he talks about doom and gloom and dips and dives. Mr. Premier, what are you going to do to put 10,000 people in agricultural Alberta, in rural Alberta to work now?

MR. KLEIN: I guess you just snap your fingers and say, "God, create the jobs."

Mr. Speaker, of course this involves . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready to proceed?

The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we will be doing in rural Alberta is building on our tremendous agricultural strength. As I was campaigning, I said that we have to get back to the basics in terms of our economic strategy. One of the most basic

industries in this province is the agricultural industry, and we have done so much to support that industry. If you look at what is happening down south and all the feedlots and the nearly half a billion dollars put into irrigation to assist the farmers, when you see the tremendous growth that is now taking place in the Drayton Valley area relative to pregnant mare urine, when you look at the recovery of the bee industry in northwestern Alberta, then you see this recovery now taking place. I'm happy and proud that our department of agriculture is fully committed to strengthening what has always been the backbone of our economy.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vegreville-Viking.

National Review of Social Programs

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents know that the fastest growing components of government budgets across this land are those that are in the areas of the social safety nets. The Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development along with the Minister of Family and Social Services met in Ottawa with their federal counterparts. Could the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development inform this House of the positive outcomes of this meeting?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the social programs in this country are due to be reviewed. We're very supportive of the action that the hon. federal minister has taken. He has put some eight programs and policies on the table to be reviewed. The Minister of Family and Social Services and I did go to Ottawa two days ago and spent the day there with other federal ministers discussing primarily the process that would be used to initiate this review. I'm glad to say that we were able to make some progress on that. We were able to also respond to the interest from other provinces regarding the successes that we've had with our welfare reforms in this province. The meeting was constructive and positive. I believe we can say that it will move forward in a positive manner.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development share with this House the level of commitment he has from the federal government that the province of Alberta will be involved in the decision-making process and the review of the social safety net?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, we went to Ottawa with the position that all provinces should be partners in this review process. After all, we should remember that the majority of the social programs that are in this country are developed at the provincial level. We also need to recognize that the provinces, by and large, are ahead of the federal government in the manner that they administer and deliver social programs. We're very pleased to say that the federal minister accepted the position that Alberta put forward and has indicated that he will allow us to play a significant part in the process as we move to review the social programs in this province. Both levels of government recognize that true reform of our social safety net must come and that that can only happen through honest, true partnership work.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister of Family and Social Services inform this House what the federal

and provincial reaction was to the positive outcomes of the recent welfare reforms in Alberta?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to participate at the meeting in Ottawa, and I was also pleased to find out that a majority of jurisdictions across Canada are very interested in seeing major changes in the delivery of welfare systems. I also found out that most jurisdictions across Canada face the same problems that we have here in Alberta in relation to that particular area. I found also that all jurisdictions, including the federal government, are willing to pull together to see major reforms put forward, to make positive changes, and possibly redirect dollars towards employment and training areas. Specific to Alberta, of course, we had a number of very successful pilot projects, part in my constituency, some in Edmonton, that the federal minister is very interested in and is encouraging us to work along with their staff in Edmonton to further develop those programs.

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

2:00 Work Force Adjustments

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in response to a question about a work force adjustment program for out-of-work health care workers, the Minister of Labour said that, yes, such a program is now under discussion, but then the Premier stood up and said that in fact a meaningful program does exist. Well, Mr. Premier, what is it? Is there a program, or isn't there a program, or don't you know?

MR. DAY: I appreciate the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite has outlined the reality that in fact we have both of those situations in operation. There are in fact work force adjustment programs that are available even right now, different things that can happen through programs available in career development and employment and other departments, and there's been excellent progress made in the overall discussion on health care in terms of upcoming work force adjustments that may be needed. So we thank him for underlining both of those realities for us.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, so there is one and there isn't one, but nobody knows about it.

Will the Premier please confirm his words yesterday when he said that voluntary severance will be part of the package for the health care workers that he's laid off?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the quotation in *Hansard*. I said absolutely nothing of the kind. I was referring to the government-initiated voluntary severance program that was extended to those employees who are accountable to government; in other words, those who work in the public service, not those who work in municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals, and all those agencies that depend on government. I did say that the minister and other ministers will work with these institutions to achieve a work force adjustment, much the same as we have put in meaningful programs in government to assist those people in a very true and meaningful way to have a dignified departure from the government and find jobs in other areas of industry in Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Page 55 of yesterday's *Hansard*, Mr. Premier.

Why would you first take jobs away from people, then promise you're going to help them, and then break your word to those unemployed Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is an absolutely nonsensical assertion. What we said to the employees of this provincial government was that we were going to treat you fairly, that we were going to give you the opportunity to decide if you wanted to leave the work force, that if you made that decision on your own, we were going to be very, very generous in our severance and we were going to put in programs and we have put in programs to help you make the adjustment from government to some other area of endeavour. That was fair; that was kind. There were 2,700 people who took our offer. Some of those people retired. Some of them have found other occupations. Some have gone back to school. But it has been fair, it has been compassionate, and it has resulted in an overall reduction of some 2,700 positions in the work force.

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

Employment Statistics

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that this week is going to be a week for statistics. My question is directed towards the minister of economic development in regards to the document tabled by the Deputy Premier. We saw yesterday the Leader of the Opposition using statistics for fear mongering in front of the cameras. Could you tell us the truth about this document, please?

MR. KOWALSKI: The document that was tabled today is one called Labour Force Statistics, January 1994, and it's freely available to any citizen in the province of Alberta. We filed it here today, Mr. Speaker, because it is kind of important.

In terms of clarification the hon. member has asked: well, what do these figures really mean? A few minutes ago we heard the Leader of the Opposition pound his desk and say: rural Alberta has lost 10,000 jobs from one period of time to the next. The reality of life in the agricultural sector, Mr. Speaker, is that in fact there's not too much harvesting going on in Alberta in December. There's even less harvesting that'll be going on in January of 1994 and in February.

Mr. Speaker, in a few days from now we will release the specific document that could actually relate to January 1994. The one that the leader of the Liberal Party quoted from had to do with December of 1993. When he sees the figure for January, he'll even see something less.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, in front of me is a map of Alberta, and it shows the various census divisions in the province of Alberta. Let's talk about rural Alberta. Let's talk about rural Alberta and the Lethbridge-Medicine Hat region of the province of Alberta. In January of 1993 there were 101,000 people . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier, with the usual reminder about brevity in answers.

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, sir, I can do this for all of the rural areas of the province of Alberta, but because of brevity, I just want to point out the Lethbridge-Medicine Hat region, the census division, and these figures: in January of 1993 there were 101,000

people employed; in January of 1994 that figure was 109,800 people. That's an increase of 8,800 in that one census division alone, Mr. Speaker. One has to take the figures; one has to study them; one has to evaluate them. You cannot correlate the fact that there is a reduction in agricultural jobs in December of 1993 to be in rural Alberta.

It wasn't very long ago that the Liberal Party was telling all the workers at Gainers: don't accept the deal; shut it down. They were promoting unemployment in this province, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the constant heckling from the other side, I'm not sure if the Deputy Premier answered the thing.

My supplementary question is . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.
Hon. member.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is in regards to the manipulation of these statistics under Alberta on page 8 of the document, the unemployment and referring to the employed people. Could the Deputy Premier please comment on that? [interjections]

MR. KOWALSKI: The dogs may howl, but the Klein caravan is moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

Very clearly in these figures, in these statistics in January of 1993 there were 1,349,900 Albertans employed. In January of 1994 that figure was 1,378,700 of the labour force. The unemployment level has gone down. The increase has been the 35,400 jobs, which very clearly has been pointed out by the Premier on numerous occasions. And, please, to all 2.6 million people in the province of Alberta: request this information, study the information, and you will know that my Premier is right on the mark.

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

MR. SPEAKER: Before the final supplemental by the hon. member the Chair wishes to remind all hon. members – because, Edmonton-Centre, it doesn't just apply to this question; there have been requests for comments from your caucus as well – that questions are supposed to be questions, not asking for comments on things.

The hon. member.

2:10 Employment Statistics (continued)

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary: in regards to page 12 on unemployed Albertans over a history of time, how have the statistics been manipulated in regards to different times of the year?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the time of the year or the season of the year in which you have the maximum number of people working in the work force in the province of Alberta is the early summer to summer to late summer, essentially the May through October time frame. The time of year in which the least number of Albertans are working is during the winter season. So when an individual member takes a figure from a December or a January or a February and then compares it to a May or a June or a July and says, "Oh, there's a difference, a job loss," that's

manipulation and that's incorrect. You have to go June to June; you have to go December to December. I repeat . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

The Deputy Premier was just concluding.

MR. KOWALSKI: Thank you, sir. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that there has been an increase of 35,400 jobs in the province of Alberta if you compare the number of people employed in the province of Alberta in December of 1993 with December of 1992. That, sir, is a fact

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

Adult Education

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government throne speech promised students equal access to quality education, but the fact is that with the elimination of the adult basic education and extension grants, it's now clear that the government feels some students are more equal than others. My question is to the government, whoever can answer the question. Where does the government expect the 7,000 students who currently attend Viscount Bennett school in Calgary – and the Premier's daughter is one of them, as he currently reminded me – to get the educational upgrading they need when it's forced to close by that Premier in September?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, one of the overall directions or messages that was not prominent but was certainly strong in the representation that we received is that Alberta Education should concentrate on ECS to grade 12 education. There was also the direction that within the system we should avoid duplication and overlap among departmental functions. With respect to the extension grants, yes, they are intended to be eliminated, and we do feel that in the system there are a number of opportunities currently existing serving many, many students. I would like the minister of advanced education to comment on the opportunities that exist in other areas.

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

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague has made the point very clearly that adult education in this province is the responsibility of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development. We do have a number of programs in place that will address the clients that were formerly served under the extension grant programs. However, we will have to make some adjustments in order to make that transition over to this department, and we're busy working on that as we speak.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, my supplementary question, then, to the minister of advanced education. There are 7,000 people here. Where are you going to find places for 7,000 students by September?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, on January 18 we did announce the grants to the major institutions in this province. The balance of the budget for the Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development will be forthcoming on February 24, and between now and that time we will be working very diligently to put in place programs that will take care of the clients that were formerly

served by the extension grants under the jurisdiction of my colleague.

MR. BRUSEKER: I guess the short answer was: I don't know. So I'll go to the Premier with my final supplementary. Mr. Premier, is cutting off extension grants for adult education part of your government's job-creation strategy to create 110,000 jobs?

MR. KLEIN: The government's strategy, Mr. Speaker, is to eliminate duplication and overlapping and achieve efficiencies in the administration. As the hon. minister of advanced education pointed out, some adjustments are being made to make sure that these students who require high school upgrading are given the opportunity to do that and to do that within existing institutions and with a more streamlined approach to the situation.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the hon. Minister of Education wish to augment?

MR. JONSON: I'd just like to augment the hon. Premier's answer, Mr. Speaker, because I feel the member opposite is leaving the wrong impression in that students currently in the extension programs are somehow not going to be able to complete the programs. As I think the hon. member knows, the school year goes to the end of June. There is a period of time that the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development has indicated that is there where transition provisions can be worked out.

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

Timber Shipments to British Columbia

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. If these people across would be quiet, they might learn something, Mr. Speaker, and become more than shadow New Democrats. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Order. [interjections] Order please.

The Chair would remind the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that that is not the proper way to lead into a question.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Environmental Protection. I have a small lumber mill in my constituency that is having difficulty getting logs. It is my understanding now that many logs, sawlogs in particular, are moving to British Columbia with the resulting loss of jobs. I'd like the Minister of Environmental Protection to tell us in this House: are logs moving to British Columbia, and what is the volume of those logs?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, there are sawlogs moving out of this province into British Columbia. Those are from private lands. They're not from our Crown lands. That's due primarily to increased prices and higher demand in British Columbia than they have wood fibre to deal with that demand. It's a little difficult to determine the exact volumes, of course, that have been going out of the province, but by our calculations and with the help of Transportation and Utilities, we estimate that there may be as high a volume as 90 million board feet that left our province last year, again off private lands. Unfortunately, that figure is actually increasing this year. We may see as much as

140 million board feet if the volumes that have been moving out in January and February continue through the year.

DR. L. TAYLOR: As a government that wishes to encourage economic growth, should this government, Mr. Minister, be doing something to encourage that the logs remain in Alberta?

MR. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, a very good question. Of course we are supportive of our forest industry in the province of Alberta. If members want to go through a review of what we have done with the forest industry in this province, I would take the time to do so, but I don't think we have time in question period. I think what we have to do, though, is recognize that this timber is coming off private land, so there are landowners who are selling their timber to the highest bidder. What we have to do in this province is to be sure that our forest industry is not disadvantaged by regulations that we have in this province that give the operators in British Columbia an unfair advantage or in fact that British Columbia may be underregulating. We're looking very carefully at that to ensure that there is a level playing field between Alberta and British Columbia.

2:20

DR. L. TAYLOR: Are there any regulations, Mr. Minister, to prevent Alberta operators from going into the field and buying these logs, much as the private operators from British Columbia are doing, and can we have some kind of sell Alberta first program?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we are trying to do is really encourage our own industry in this province to go out and buy those private land logs. In point of fact, the Alberta Forest Products Association has had a number of meetings with both my Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, the Deputy Premier's department, in terms of getting to understand this issue a lot better. One positive that I can speak to directly is an agreement that we reached earlier this year with the Alberta Forest Products Association to double the basic price for stumpage in this province and to have an ascending fee structure that was market driven, that provided the province of Alberta a higher price as the price of logs increased on the fair market after the costs of industry were taken into account. I think that in and of itself is going to be more of an incentive for the industry to look at private logs, private wood, as an alternative because the cost of Crown wood is going up.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

School Dropout Rate

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our questions on jobs and on education we've highlighted and the Premier has certainly reinforced how important it is to stay in school and get a decent education. I don't think we need statistics to know that better education means better job prospects. The fact is that too many young Albertans are dropping out of high school. My first question is to the Minister of Education. These young Albertans desperately want your help. What are you going to do about it?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we are emphasizing a quality education for Alberta students. In terms of the relative

priority of government with respect to all the departments of government, education is at the top. We've shown that it's a number one priority with the government. We're working hard at improving the quality of education, the programs that are being offered to students, looking at partnerships with business and industry. We are working very, very hard to provide quality education which will provide the bridge, the access to the jobs that the hon. member is referring to.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that the minister answered the question. I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, what you're going to do now to reduce the alarming dropout rate in this province.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to those students leaving school, I do not accept the member's contention that we have a dropout rate which is out of line. In fact, it ranks fairly well across Canada. However, it is an area for concern. It certainly is. We are working to provide programs which are appropriate for students, which will cause them to stay in school. We have our RAP program, which provides a transition into the area of apprenticeship. We are co-operating in stay-in-school initiatives. I think we are making an overall sound effort in this regard. We recognize it is something that has to be addressed, and we are certainly concerned. We are working on that.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that note, then, according to the minister's answer, what is an acceptable dropout rate in this province?

MR. JONSON: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the ideal would be zero. However, there are going to be people who leave school and get jobs, and many do. There are opportunities in the job market that have been referred to, and it is not in my view a dropout in a negative sense if people can seek employment, get into apprenticeship, as I mentioned before. With respect to moving from one educational institution to another, I suppose the hon. member's referring to that as a dropout, but I don't consider it that. In terms of the magic percentage, we want the dropout to be as low as possible, and we're working in that direction.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Wainwright.

Grain Handlers' Strike

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Our forefathers came to western Canada and worked their hearts out to open up our great land here. Thanks to them, a hundred years later the grain industry became the backbone of the economy which depends so heavily on exports. Labour disputes with the grain handlers has threatened the existence of the very industry. Could the minister tell us what the impact of the recent west coast strike has been on grain movement?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the strike that has just concluded as a result of legislation has been devastating to the agricultural community. There seems to be a series of ongoing strikes that carry on and on and on. At least

once a year there seems to be this process that the agricultural community has to contend with, yet they have no way of dealing with the issue. To date the strike has cost the agricultural community something in the area of a backlog of a half a million tonnes of grain that are sitting in railroad cars unloaded at the terminals, something in the area of 100,000 tonnes of canola, value of \$37 million that the producers are not able to pocket. I've had calls from producers that have contracted grain to the Canadian Wheat Board that indeed have been able to market 20 percent of their contract, yet they're tied in to that contract, and they're not able to have the flexibility of marketing elsewhere. The results of this strike have indeed been devastating to an entire industry throughout western Canada, not just Alberta.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. What recommendations have been made by Alberta to the federal government concerning this strike?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We've communicated to the federal minister our wishes from our perspective in the province of Alberta. That basically is what the agricultural community is asking for; that is, they should have the option of marketing that grain. They should ultimately make the decision as to how the grain is going to be marketed, what ports are used, and what efforts they as individual producers can use in establishing where that grain is marketed and what the process will be. We cannot continue with the present process, so we have asked the federal government to review the WGTA with the idea of changing the meaning of the word export, because with the present WGTA you have to export the product. In order to benefit from the Crow benefit, you have to export through a Canadian port. We have to have other options, and when the options are there, farmers will then once again be in control of their own industry.

MR. FISCHER: Do we have another strike coming, then, given that the grain handlers' union has been without a contract since last December?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, there is a danger of another strike, and again that's why we're urging the federal government to take immediate action to deal with the issue on a broader concept than what they're dealing with, just legislating these people back to work. They're still agreed to a \$2.75 an hour wage increase, and they're holding out for a \$3 wage increase. There are something like 16 unions involved before a producer can market his grain to export. This is an ongoing saga, and we must make the changes. We're urging the federal government to review the whole context of the WGTA, to change the method of payment, pay the farmer, and allow the farmer to make that ultimate decision.

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

Biprovincial Upgrader

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October of 1992 this government set up a numbered company to funnel cash to cover the operating cash shortfalls of the Lloydminster upgrader. In the past year alone taxpayers have paid over \$200,000 just in interest to cover these advances. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister tell us what the interest tab will be for this upcoming year?

2:30

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in saying that the upgrader was funded for the capital side under the heritage

trust fund. There was indeed an operating company set up to carry on the operations, particularly as there were overruns on the operating account. It was called 540540 Alberta Ltd. The operating shortfalls for Alberta's share were flowing through that company and had been under the management of Alberta Oil Sands Equity, who has been our equity management group for the oil sands areas including the upgrader. So the reports that come through, and the hon. Treasurer — they show up in the public accounts as they're filed. At the end of each year a report comes through and is audited and enters into the public accounts.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I guess we don't know what the interest tab is going to be.

My second question, Mr. Speaker, is: why are Alberta taxpayers in the business of making interest payments to numbered companies for government cash advances?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. member that the province of Alberta has a 24.17 percent interest as a joint venture partner in the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader. As is the case with all joint venture agreements — I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-West with his accounting background would have knowledge that there are obligations for joint venture agreements, and this is no different from those.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Well, will the minister undertake here today to table these secret joint venture agreements which obligate taxpayers to pay these interest charges?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member also knows, as he in his former life was a professional accountant. . . .

MR. HENRY: It's called freedom of information, the taxpayers' dollars.

MRS. BLACK: . . . that when there are private-sector interests involved in this . . .

MR. HENRY: Oh, yeah. Open and accountable.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order, Edmonton-Centre.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is difficult to get information out when the dogs are barking.

Mr. Speaker, we do appear before the Public Accounts of this Legislature and the heritage trust fund committee meetings to discuss our investment and our equity position in the Lloydminster upgrader. It is not the role of the Minister of Energy to discuss the private sector's involvement in a commercial arrangement. I am fully prepared to discuss Alberta's position in that as it pertains to our 24.17 percent interest.

MR. DINNING: May I refer the hon. member to the public accounts of the province of Alberta dated 1992-93, volume 3, which was filed in this Assembly prior to September 30, 1993, wherein, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear. Page 1.124, the nature of the operation is described as:

The Province of Alberta . . . as a joint venture participant. . . funding its share of any operating shortfalls incurred by the Lloydminster Biprovincial Upgrader.

It goes on to note in note 5 that the company will receive advances to a maximum of \$12 million

to the Operator of the Biprovincial Upgrader in an amount equal to the Province's share of the Mandatory Operating Shortfalls.

Mr. Speaker, this open accounting process of the government, fully accountable to the Legislature and to the people of Alberta, these facts are on the public record, and they will continue to be on the public record.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired. The Chair has received notice from the hon. Opposition House Leader and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre that they wish to raise points of order.

Point of Order Supplementary Responses

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 13 to simply ask for clarification of your ruling earlier today. In question period the Treasurer offered supplementary information in answer to a question by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, the Leader of the Opposition. There is a tradition in this House, as we all know, that a minister can supplement the Premier's answer or another minister's answer. Of course, in the Premier's case that seems to be necessary often.

It's also true, Mr. Speaker, that there's another tradition in this House that supplementary information is frequently offered at the end of question period when a minister receives information later on in question period past the time of the original question. At that time, of course, the original questioner is allowed to rise and ask a supplemental question in response to that new information.

What happened – and in the heat of the moment it's of course understandable, Mr. Speaker, that this might happen. It's difficult to follow the answers to questions sometimes, but what happened today should have fallen into the second category. The Treasurer offered supplementary information on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business question, which was the Leader of the Opposition's first question. However, and ironically, he offered that supplementary information during the Leader of the Opposition's third set of questions, which was about agricultural job losses in Alberta. So it was inappropriate that that supplementary information should have been offered then. It should have been offered at the end of the question period, added onto question period, and the Leader of the Opposition should have been entitled to a supplementary question. So clearly the Treasurer should understand that there is a time to provide supplementary information, and there's a time not to. Today he was simply out of sync, as is often the case.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, you have my sympathies because you have to feign interest in such a rambling retort. I am not bound by that. This totally circuitous, rambling babbling, it only . . . [interjections] He may be intimidated by the Member for Edmonton-Centre who's trying to rival him for that title of Rambling Rose.

Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 420 is very clear.

The Chair will allow a question to be put to a certain Minister; but it cannot insist that that Minister rather than another [minister] should answer it.

The strategy here is very clear. The questions are coming to the Premier, in many cases very specific questions. I for one am actually – and I know my colleagues join me in saying they are delighted that the Premier is so much aware of what goes on in every department, that he deals with these. If questions are coming to the Premier or there's going to be supplementary information given, it's very clear in *Beauchesne* that that's permitted. What the member opposite wants to do is actually increase the length of question period. We already have the longest question period in this country, and we should be proud of

that. [interjections] Not only do they ramble when they have the floor; they ramble when they don't have the floor. He's gone berserk. He may be clinically certifiable at this point, Mr. Speaker.

There is no point of order. [interjections]

2:40

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members. [interjections] Order please. The Chair would like to remind hon. members that it costs money to conduct parliamentary business. I don't think anybody should say that we should be parsimonious in the exercise of democracy, but nevertheless there should be some respect for the people who have to pay the bills for democracy. Therefore, the Chair would remind hon. members that we this week so far have not been overly productive because of the talk back and forth.

The Chair would acknowledge that perhaps the complaint of the hon. Opposition House Leader has some merit, but it's very difficult particularly in today's case when the first three main questions were pretty well intertwined. [interjections] Well, the subject matter was jobs in various sectors of the economy. The Chair recognizes what the hon. Opposition House Leader has said, and there's really nothing that can be done now because of course the Chair didn't know what the hon. Provincial Treasurer was going to say when he offered his supplemental information. In any event, we trust that this can be sort of dealt with on the basis of a disagreement between hon. members in the Assembly and hope that we can keep to the proper order.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has said that he wishes to raise a point of order.

Point of Order Answers to Questions

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your comments about the cost of running the operation here, and it brings me to my point of order. As you've said, the purpose of question period is for members to obtain information from the government as a whole, and there are generally three main ways in which we obtain information from the government: one being question period, the other being written questions, and motions for returns. The citations I would like to use are 34(1) and (2), 13(2) of Standing Orders, as well as 416 of *Beauchesne*. I certainly accept your previous ruling, sir, and I quote *Beauchesne* 416.

A minister may decline to answer a question . . . and this is in question period

. . . without stating the reason for refusing, and insistence on an answer is [inappropriate].

Mr. Speaker, I'm asking for an explanation of how we operate here, because the ministers and the government also have the option of either accepting or rejecting a written question and a motion for a return. There seem to be two sets of rules here. When a minister stands and chooses not to provide information – and I'm referring to the question from the hon. Member for Calgary-West where he asked the minister to undertake to table the agreements that the government of Alberta has entered into. Certainly if that was a written question or a motion for a return, the minister could stand up and say yes or no, I decline or I accept that. I'm wondering why in question period ministers are not required, if they choose to decline a question, simply to say, "I refuse to answer that question" or "I decline to answer that question," without giving an ongoing speech about other details that have nothing germane to the question that's being asked. The point is: if the government front bench wishes to refuse to answer a question – you've said many times that it has a right to do that – all we're asking for is that they stand up and be forthright and

say, "We refuse to answer," instead of trying to get around and give speeches about something that's not quite relevant to the question that's being asked.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears that what I said in jest in fact is reality. The Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Opposition House Leader are in fact in a contest to see who can babble on the longest and not talk about anything. We give the award to the Member for Edmonton-Centre. *Beauchesne* is very clear – very clear – that a member cannot insist on an answer or a certain type of answer unless, of course, it's outside the boundaries of what can or can't be said in this Assembly. I would suggest the member opposite cease to waste the time of this Assembly so that we can get on with the business that the people of Alberta want us to get on with.

There's no point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the Chair does not accept this point of order. It is not a point of order. The general rule as interpreted by *Beauchesne* is that ministers will answer a question in the manner they see fit, and if it doesn't turn out to be an answer in somebody's mind, that's the way the cookie crumbles. That is the way all parliaments operate, and I don't think that this Assembly wants to make a radical departure from the way things are generally done in this country.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: I want to say a word or two about question period this week. We have had, I still think, a gradual improvement from the way we started.

The Chair is not doing this because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised the point of order; the Chair was going to do this in any event. There are two members on the opposition side, who are the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, who make altogether too much noise in this Assembly during question period. The Chair is going to be continuing to watch these members to see if they can improve their deportment in this Chamber, because it is not acceptable.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

AN HON. MEMBER: We have guests, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oh, sorry. May there be unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly nine outstanding student leaders from our university system who have joined us to watch today's proceedings from the members' gallery. These people work hard to represent the views of students to government, and, believe me, having had contact with them over

the last year, they do an excellent job. From the University of Calgary we have David MacCarthy, chairman of the Council of Alberta University Students; from the University of Calgary is Chima Nkendirim; from the University of Alberta we have Terence Filewych, Karen Wichuk, Frank Coughlan, and Kim Krushell; from the University of Lethbridge, Sandy Lawson and Brian Stewart; and from Athabasca University, Mike Ryan. I'd ask them all to please stand and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Written Questions

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that the written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that the motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 201

Electoral Boundaries (Reduction) Act

[Debate adjourned February 15: Mr. Woloshyn speaking]

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I concluded my remarks last day, I'd indicated that the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission was to be a judge or a retired judge. The remaining four members: one has to be the Chief Electoral Officer, one of the members at large is nominated by the opposition, and the remaining two members would be appointed by the president of Executive Council.

If we go back and look at what the Liberals proposed as the makeup of the commission before Bill 201 was created, again it looks a little different than Bill 201. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo, again speaking not as an MLA but on behalf of the Liberal Party, outlined the Liberal proposal in the same presentation I mentioned yesterday, on page 240. He stated that the commission should include:

one Queen's Bench judge, the Chief Electoral Officer, one appointee from the city of Edmonton, one [appointee] from the city of Calgary, one representative of a major agricultural organization in the province, one appointee from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and one appointee from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

That commission looks significantly different than Bill 201, where you'll have one individual with total autocratic control. I guess the Leader of the Opposition feels that these other groups that I just mentioned now have little or nothing to offer to the process, or perhaps he wishes to distance himself from the wishes of his party.

2:50

Now, the Liberals put out a press release about a month ago explaining the Bill. In it the Liberals claim that their new process will be completely nonpartisan and fair to all Albertans. But do they really want nonpartisan commissions? I'd say no, at least not

according to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. In his presentation to that same special select committee he states:

If your committee, Mr. Chairman, is not disposed to . . . this type of nonpartisan representation, then we strongly urge that the commission representation include a representative of the . . . Liberal Party.

Very interesting. The Liberals want a nonpartisan process unless it is not one, in which case they want to elbow in and be a part of a partisan process. Mr. Speaker, inconsistency runs rampant across the way, and I fear that it's only going to get worse as the session continues.

Mr. Speaker, I feel this Bill should be defeated. I'm concerned that the Liberals are still not sure what they want, nor will they ever be sure of what they want, for, heaven help them, they know not what they want. The leader has sponsored a Bill for this Legislature to consider. The timing of the Bill shows how disjointed their agenda is. What would be proposed that we do, stop the business of government now? If he had stated other important areas which this government has taken very proactive measures to address, such as education, health, welfare, the economy, but, no, he wants to tinker – and, I stress, to tinker – with the Legislature, to go against the wishes of his own colleagues.

I think perhaps we should tinker with – I shouldn't say "tinker with" – go along with the hon. Leader of the Opposition's Bill. He wants to remove 18 seats. We all know that the rural areas are underrepresented as it is if you consider all the factors that make for good representation, including area. So we are left with taking 18 seats out of the urban areas. Now, this would be contrary to what Calgary-Buffalo had said. Nonetheless, we'll have to do that, because obviously if we start combining some of the rural ridings – if I look at a map of Alberta, Peace River, Lesser Slave Lake, and Athabasca-Wabasca cover all of northern Alberta right across the whole Territories' boundary. So we wouldn't want to do that. They're now obviously extremely difficult for the members to service.

So we get back and we look at Edmonton. Well, what would we combine with Edmonton-Glengarry? Perhaps Edmonton-Norwood. If you look at your maps, that would make a very good one. Or if there's a preference not to combine Edmonton-Norwood with Edmonton-Glengarry, then Edmonton-Roper would be a good one because that also borders nicely and we wouldn't have to do too many adjustments. Perhaps Edmonton-Manning would be one with Edmonton-Glengarry, but then whoever represented Edmonton-Glengarry might have to travel more than a mile or two from home to represent it. Of course, that's better than crossing the river, if you lived in the riding.

Then we go look at the rest of it. If you look at Edmonton-Whitemud, that makes a good mix with Edmonton-Mill Woods, and so on and so forth.

MR. WICKMAN: How do you go Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Mill Woods?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I find it interesting. See, this just shows. The question from across the way, Mr. Speaker, if I may digress, was: how do you put Edmonton-Whitemud with Edmonton-Mill Woods? Well, hon. member, if you look at a constituency map of your own city, you will see that Edmonton-Whitemud goes right alongside Edmonton-Mill Woods. The strip is very narrow, and it would actually probably be a little bit more sensible, so that's a very good way to do it.

Then we look at Edmonton-Rutherford with Edmonton-Strathcona. So the combinations are just many and numerous.

However, I would wonder why this Bill that's supposed to save whatever it was that it was supposed to save did not go into specifics. I would suggest it didn't go into specifics because how would Edmonton-Glengarry explain to Edmonton-Norwood or Edmonton-Mayfield or Edmonton-Manning or Edmonton-Roper that he would like to absorb those ridings? How would Edmonton-Mill Woods explain to Edmonton-Rutherford or Edmonton-Whitemud or Edmonton-McClung that they want to get together?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park is rising on a point of order.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll quote *Beauchesne* 459. I know that for you, sir, it's difficult sometimes to determine where relevance is appropriate and where it is not in terms of calling on a point of order. As I read the Bill, the essence of this Bill is that politicians do not enter into the debate of where the boundaries should be. In fact, the essence of the Bill is to prevent politicians from second-guessing where the boundaries are going to be. So for us to enter into debate about where the border for Edmonton-Glengarry is going to be and where the border for Edmonton-Norwood is going to be perhaps misses the point and helps the rest of us recognize that the hon. Member for Stony Plain has missed the point of the whole Bill. That's why I called him on a point of relevance.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair would say that this is a debate concerning this Bill, hon. member. Maybe the hon. Member for Stony Plain thinks that political persons or elected persons should have something to say about drawing the boundaries irrespective of what this Bill says. That's the nature of debate. The Chair is not prepared to call the member to order on the issue of relevance just because he happens to disagree with the principle of the Bill.

Debate Continued

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize to the Member for Sherwood Park, however, since his riding is too far removed from Edmonton-Glengarry for me to try to put it together. If it were closer, it would have been mentioned too. So, Sherwood Park, you're in the picture, and we'll look at Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont with you if you would like or Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

I will not continue the comparisons there because I think the point is well made, the point being that if we're looking at scaling down the Legislature – if in fact that's what the direction of this is – we would be looking primarily at areas, because the rural areas are now such that when you combine them with population and square kilometres, they are stretched to the limits. We would have to look at the urban areas. I think the most realistic ones, the ones who have more MLAs and aldermen, in both cases are the two major cities, so it would be logical from the principle of the Bill to look at that. I was just trying to point out for all hon. members that the combinations there, especially in Edmonton, whichever way they went, whoever drew them, I would be totally in support of as long as the end result was a fair representation of Edmonton relative to the rest of Alberta and Calgary and so on.

I think, Mr. Speaker, to put this whole debate into context, only a year or two back we went through the whole process. The current electoral map was drawn up very well considering the opposition parties chose to boycott the process and then convolute the House and go towards a filibuster to make us reconvene because of the omission of a chunk of Alberta. The point that should be made is that the end result was a very fair and equitable electoral boundaries map that in fact was drawn by politicians. I have to commend the politicians who drew it, because it met all the criteria required. I would also like to state on the record that when the Liberal Party across the way start talking about partisanship, they'd better look in the mirror and say: what am I really saying? On the new map as drawn up by the governing party – the Tories, the Conservatives, whatever you would like to refer to them as – the politicians drew the map which in fact gave the Liberal Party a net gain of a considerable number of seats. It also eliminated the New Democrats from this Legislature. I would like to see how politicians or judges or anybody drawing lines on a map could influence the voters to say which party they're going to go for. The accusations of gerrymandering, of making it fit this one or that one are just frivolous and unwarranted. Now, the whole basis of this exercise of having the major Bill come up here and have this as a burning issue in Alberta today, from anybody's point of view – I just find it totally impossible to understand how anybody would make that kind of assertion.

I would like to urge all hon. members, on both sides of the House, to unanimously reject this – it wasn't thought out – piece of legislation that shouldn't even have been presented to this House in any form.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I strongly support Bill 201, the Electoral Boundaries (Reduction) Act. [interjections] Yes, we know: it's always important; he always has to have the open mouth.

Electoral boundaries. The time has come. Mr. Speaker, this is a very clear and simple Bill, which will reduce the number of MLAs from 83 to 65. As we all know, real or true leadership comes from the top. It is commonly known as leadership by example. Role-modeling is needed. Every group in society is cutting back. It is time for the Legislative Assembly to do the same. Instead of taking positive steps, we've just heard what the Member for Stony Plain has suggested. We don't set an example. We don't role-model. The cuts in our budget don't affect any member here.

Leadership of this government consists of leadership through conflict amongst groups in Alberta, and that is a shame. What we need is leadership that elevates all groups in Alberta upward, not downward. This government tries to break and split groups, have them fight amongst themselves. Urban against rural: you have the rural members going out and saying that this is an urban plot to destroy rural Alberta. What a slam. What a shame. What an embarrassment. For political expediency. We all know rural Alberta is the backbone of this province. Agriculture is the backbone. We know that the national parks and tourism areas are the backbone, for tourism is going to increase presently and in the future. We know natural gas and oil are found in rural Alberta, and we know that as we go forward we have to work together.

A strong province has all groups and all areas working together. We say that it's like the body: if one part of the body doesn't work, the whole body's affected. In a similar way, this is what

needs to happen in this province. Instead of pitting urban groups against rural groups, we have to get together and realize that we all benefit when Alberta benefits and we all suffer when Alberta suffers or if certain areas suffer.

We have, again, an economic aspect. Businessmen fighting against businessmen. This government is causing conflict of business against business as in the case of ALCB, a process not thought through. Lastly, we have the rich against the poor. It's always easy for the rich and those at the top to undermine the poor. The government has launched an attack on administrators. There is need to make the system more efficient, but the top administrators in this province are here in this Legislative Assembly, the 83 MLAs. If this government is true to its policy of reducing administration, it is only correct to reduce the number of MLAs. Then and only then will Albertans start to trust politicians again. The main objective is to reduce the number of MLAs from 83 to 65.

Secondly, this Act would eliminate politicians from the process of drawing electoral boundaries: needed. In the last drawing of the boundaries we saw the conflicts, the complications, the gerrymandering that went on. Don't try to insult the intelligence of Albertans, for they know this has happened even when it benefited their riding – people are well educated today in all parts of this province – and that's why there is great distrust of politicians: because they go out and spread information and try and pull scams on the public.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that you?

MR. BRACKO: No, that's that side. A \$30 billion debt and increasing: NovAtel, Gainers, MagCan, and on, and on. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. BRACKO: Well, they asked the question, Mr. Speaker. I enjoy answering it. [interjection] Yes. When students that graduate have to pay this government's pension bill till they're 84 years old, that's what I call leadership.

The power would be handed over to a commission, Chief Justice, taken completely out of the hands of politicians. The commission would come up with an interim report in a short time: nine months. There'd be public hearings again for information. The census could be taken every five years, so boundaries could be adjusted. There'd also be consideration given to different areas – rural areas, isolated communities – to make sure they're represented. We also see that the final report should be made shortly after that.

So what we're looking at, Mr. Speaker, is a Bill that will benefit Albertans. Starting at the top, we have newer technology that the members can use to meet the needs of our constituents. Why are we afraid to use it and move forward? But it takes leadership, and it means that cutting at the top sets the example for the rest of public and private enterprise. It also saves \$2.5 million. It's not a large amount compared to our budget but an amount that can greatly benefit some of our people. We need to seriously consider this, lead by example. Our province would be somewhere in the centre if we reduced it to 65, a 40,000 average population. Some are much higher; some are less, like P.E.I. In this it would be done, and real representation would be looked at carefully.

This isn't a Bill to destroy rural Alberta; it's to elevate it. We know that there's a need for both rural and urban areas to work together to make this province and to improve this province as it once was. We realize that both urban and rural areas would lose

constituencies, and that can be worked out. It would follow, of course, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and also the Supreme Court ruling so as to be done fairly and done right. We all know and we talk about rural Alberta having greater areas to cover. Exactly. But we also realize we're cutting a number of boards: health boards down to whatever the number is – 10, 15, we haven't heard yet – and school boards from 140 to 60. The Minister of Municipal Affairs wants to see the number of municipal councils and counties cut down to about 20 percent of what we have now. That would be his goal, as he mentioned at a convention. So we can see that there'll be less boards to meet with and, therefore, better communication between the MLAs and the different areas. So it's important that we take a positive step: reduce the number – leadership at the top – become more efficient, like business, like the public service is becoming, and do the right thing.

So I strongly support and ask the members of this Legislature to take positive action, to show real leadership, leadership by role-modeling, and support this Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to rise today to talk to Bill 201, that was presented yesterday by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

I was one of those unfortunate or fortunate – I'm not too sure – folks charged with the responsibility, after being duly elected a few months prior, to form an Electoral Boundaries Committee. It was a dreadfully onerous task to go out around this province and seek input from people as to how legislation should be struck to deal with redistribution within this province. I had only been in the Legislature a matter of months when August of 1989 arrived and we were sent out to talk to the people of Alberta. It was an all-party committee, Mr. Speaker, of representatives from this Legislature that was given that task, and we did indeed take the task on. We traveled for months and hit hundreds of meetings and locations and talked to thousands of people and heard representations from throughout this province. It was an opportunity that I was grateful to have had because it gave me the chance to get around Alberta into communities that I had never visited in my life. I was born and raised in Alberta, and I had to admit that I was ashamed that I had not taken the drive through Alberta and seen the differences in the communities from north to south, from east to west. It certainly gave me an appreciation of the disparities that exist within our own province that we often overlook and the different needs that have to be met within this province. I returned to my home in Calgary many a time and wondered how fortunate we were in Calgary to have the amenities that we did so very close to home that other neighbours in the rural areas hadn't even thought of having. I came forward with a different perspective on what needed to take place within our province and provincially. It's probably because of that, Mr. Speaker, that I asked if I could be part of this debate today to talk on redistribution.

One of the things that often bothered me as we traveled and listened to the people was that people talked about effective representation. There were lots of references by the lawyers to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but they talked about effective representation, and I often wondered and used to ask the question: could someone please define that for me? Is that strictly a numbers game? I don't think so. Or was that someone that the people could talk to, could relate to, could get to and express their

concerns and give advice and guidance as we go through some difficult times?

One of the things we heard every so often, particularly usually from the academics, I might add, Mr. Speaker, was that with the new technology in place you could put a conference phone here and talk to a constituent a thousand miles away, and it would be just the same as having that person. Well, you know, that works great in theory, but someone at the other end has got to have the same equipment. You know, you can't have the equipment sitting only in a legislative office; somebody at the other end has to have the same receiving equipment. It may be quite surprising that there are a lot of communities that don't have the technology readily available to them in those smaller communities. So they do need to see their MLA; it becomes very important to the people in those areas.

When I looked at this Bill – more specific to the Bill – I was a little surprised that this was the first Bill coming from the Leader of the Official Opposition, after the lengthy time that we spent in this Legislature debating the electoral boundaries issue. The Member for Calgary-North West served on the original committee with us and, I have to say, put in yeoman service on that committee. He worked very, very hard and traveled with us throughout this province, as did the other members from our own party and the NDP. We traveled together, and we listened to the people, and we came back with a report that we filed in November of 1990. Keep in mind we started the process in August of 1989, and we came back with a report, which has been filed and debated, in November of 1990. That's almost 14 months to come forward with the opinions of the people of Alberta. I will have to admit that we didn't always agree, but that's the way of human nature: you're not always going to agree.

In coming forward with this report, we talked about things that are addressed in this piece of legislation. One of those was: how do we have representation in the province of Alberta? We used to be geared on the number of eligible voters in a riding, but it became clear that we needed to switch to full population. We had to recognize that there were some communities that would choose not to be listed in a census or an enumeration, but we had to make sure that those people were counted because they deserve to be represented in this Legislature.

We also looked at where we would get that data. Gathering data on population is not that simple. It sounds like it should be if you use the federal census, but having gone through the exercise, it's not that easy. We had to come to the conclusion – it wasn't our first choice, but that was all that we had available – that we would gear the legislation and the distribution based on the most recent census data available. At the time of this report – that was 1986 – nobody was thrilled with that, but that's all that was available. We debated that at great length.

Well, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in the report we also recommended the makeup of the commission. We felt after what we had gone through that MLAs didn't want to be a part of that commission. The responsibility rests with this Legislature to form a commission, so we did. We picked a judge to head up the commission, the Chief Electoral Officer, and three other members that would be agreed upon by the three parties of this Legislature.

MR. CHADI: Politicians.

MRS. BLACK: No, not politicians. In fact, we said MLAs should not be part of that commission, and we put that forward.

We also said that there had to be a recognition, Mr. Speaker, of the disparities and needs within this province. I'll never forget when I went up into what had been the old riding of Fort

McMurray. I may be off one or two kilometres, so please don't hang me for being off, but I remember that the area of that riding was 114,000 square kilometres that one MLA had to cover. Some say, "Well, it's sparsely populated." Well, that's true. That's true. But it went down from the lower end all the way up to Fort Chipewyan at the top, and there was one road. If it was nice weather, you could get up there; if it wasn't, well, you just couldn't go. That was just the way it was. Then I looked at my own area in Calgary and realized that we had approximately 500 square kilometres of area and we had 18 MLAs. Eighteen MLAs in Calgary.

MR. CARDINAL: And six MPs.

MRS. BLACK: You're right. We had six MPs, and we had only 500-some-odd square kilometres. We had 114,000 square kilometres for Fort McMurray with one MLA. You had to recognize: there's a problem here.

So I go back to: what is effective representation? Do those people have the same opportunity to be represented in this House as someone from Edmonton or Calgary has? Well, that was a question we had some uncertainty with, and that's why, Mr. Speaker, we came in, as did other provinces, with a variance. We checked the court cases. There was a case in B.C. that had been presented. We went through a whole process of what was appropriate and what was not. In fact, we even carried it further. We said there are certain areas in this province that because of the terrain, because of the existing road systems that are there, because of the sparsity of the communities, there had to be some special areas. It wasn't easy to define, but we said: that has to be kept to a minimum; that can't be the norm; that has to be the exception. So that was dealt with.

3:20

It was interesting, Mr. Speaker. We then said: "What instructions do we give to this commission? We'll draw this up, and we're going to ask this commission to draw the lines." So we formed the commission, and we had input from the three leaders in this House. We have the judge on side and the Chief Electoral Officer, and we think our day has ended: "All we have to do now is sit back for the next year, and they will go and draw the lines." Never in our fondest dreams did we ever think it would come back. Well, wrong. It came back. The first judge quit after six months, and they brought another judge in. They started over again. They started wrangling constitutional things, et cetera, and in May or June of 1992 they came forward with a report. Unfortunately, they had failed to reach any form of consensus and, in fact, filed five separate reports and no maps.

Well, unfortunately, the ultimate responsibility rests in this Legislature to have the boundaries dealt with before the next election. The clock was ticking, and the original committee was assigned the task to go back, take all the data, and draw the lines. However, what had happened in the meantime: there had been another census, a federal census. Because our intent was, Mr. Speaker, to utilize the most current data possible, we said: "Let's use the 1991 census. We're into 1992; this should be readily available." Wrong. It wasn't. So in the summer of 1992 we were trying to gather 1991 census data. Well, it wasn't broken down; it wasn't specific to the county or the community. It wasn't broken down at all. Quite frankly, if we hadn't had the co-operation of the local communities and municipal bodies, we would not have had the broken down detail of that census information because it wasn't available. So off we went and drew lines, and we completed those lines in August. I'll never forget

spending the month of August in my home in Calgary with maps of the city of Calgary all over the dining room walls, counting people from community groups and drawing lines. It wasn't exactly the way I had thought I was going to be spending August of 1992.

Mr. Speaker, then we had to validate all of our numbers. We brought that back. We worked with the Alberta Bureau of Statistics, and they came back with verification. We found that in fact there were communities – some of the native settlements had chosen not to participate in the census, and they had not been counted. Well, that wasn't appropriate, so we had to go back and get numbers and include our native population, because we represent all of the people in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, part of the problem with this Bill, I think, is that, first of all, you're asking one person, a Chief Justice, to be the commission. I think you're putting an awful lot on one person. You've asked for the Chief Electoral Officer to sit as a nonvoting member – this is an onerous, difficult task; it is not easy – and I think that's a mistake. I look at the time frames involved and realize that the Member for Calgary-North West and I spent basically 14 months working on this project, and unless you have people working full-time to do nothing else but this project, you're expecting an awful lot to have this done in that kind of time. Nine months and three months: I mean, it would be nice, but it's not realistic. It is just not practical to have the depth of knowledge that you've got to gain outside of Edmonton to deal with the needs of effective representation in this province.

I find it a little amazing also that you want to do it every five years. Well, I'm sorry, but you have to wait until year two or year three after the census is taken to get the detailed information for the breakdown from the census to apply it to communities so you can find out how many people live in what community to draw the lines. You're asking again for a task that is not reasonably sound. That is why our recommendation came forward that this be done once every 10 years: so you have that data available, and you're not scrambling trying to find it and trying to factor in people or blocks of people that have been totally missed. The cost of doing this on an ongoing basis is horrendous. Far better if there had been a suggestion, Mr. Speaker, that we maybe consider employing a different method of a permanent voters list, like they have in other provinces, where the responsibility rests with the voter. That might have been an innovative approach. However, I'm not going to get into that.

MR. CHADI: This is the 90s, Pat.

MRS. BLACK: That is the 90s, and maybe they can get into that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I looked at the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We had that in our proposal all the way through. But I still wonder and I go back to my original comments: what is effective representation? Is that having a computer linkup here and one out in High River or High Level or Fort Chipewyan or over in Peace River? I don't think so.

I also am a little surprised at the contradiction. When we went night after night after night in this Legislature and debated these issues, and you had a member from your caucus who worked for 14 months and worked damn hard, who went from community to community, meeting to meeting to talk with people on this committee – and I have to give the Member for Calgary-North West a lot of credit, because he didn't have a lot of support from his own caucus. In fact, when we debated the report in this Legislature night after night, there wasn't a Liberal that showed up, Mr. Speaker, to back the recommendations by the Member for Calgary-North West. In fact, he put through so many amendments

that it got to be actually quite embarrassing that the other members of the committee were almost going to vote for his amendments because he didn't have another Liberal in the House. [interjections] I have the votes if you want to check *Hansard*. I've gone back because it was a disgrace.

I'd like to also say that I'm surprised that the hon. leader has asked for a reduction in the number of members. Our colleague earlier said that there was a representation by Calgary-Buffalo – I remember that meeting – to actually increase the Legislature by 10 to 12 seats when he appeared before the commission representing the Liberal Party of Alberta. At the time I challenged him and said: "How can you possibly suggest such a thing? Do you realize the cost to the taxpayers to support 10 or 12 more MLAs when everybody else is pulling down the number of MLAs?" He said: we need to have effective representation. But there was no definition again. Now he is a member of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and I guess he's rethought his position, but I'd like to know if he's prepared to give up his seat in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, I refer to *Hansard* of November 27, 1990, when the Member for Calgary-North West talked about the position of the party, when he in all honesty was putting through what he felt were very valid amendments and, I presume, had had the support of his Liberal caucus. He said on page 2484, "The first recommendation with which we agree, of course, is simply the number of electoral divisions remaining at 83."

MR. DAY: Oh, who said that?

MRS. BLACK: This was from the Member for Calgary-North West, who had been the representative of the Liberal Party on the committee. Currently that is the number, of course, as we are all aware.

MR. DAY: Some members didn't hear that.

AN HON. MEMBER: Could you repeat that, please?

MRS. BLACK: I will repeat it: "The first recommendation with which we agree, of course, is simply the number of electoral divisions remaining at 83."

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: That was then, and this is now.

MRS. BLACK: Well, I'm glad that the hon. member has said, "That was then, and this is now," because I have a suggestion for her. When you are looking at 1994 and beyond, I would like to make a suggestion to you, and I probably would have been more receptive had this been in the Bill, considering the reason this Bill was presented was to save the taxpayers some money. You may want to introduce some changes and talk to your caucus about this. I haven't talked to anyone else, but when I was reading this, I thought: what a good idea. What a good idea to think of the cost to the taxpayer. So when you sit in the city of Edmonton in particular and you realize that you have, I believe, 18 MLAs from the city of Edmonton who are in less than 500 square miles of proximity of their constituents – you can go from one end of Edmonton to the other end of Edmonton in less than 20 minutes – maybe they could eliminate their offices.

3:30

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak in support of Bill 201. I'm going to speak from the point of view

that the former speaker just started to touch on, and it's a very, very important point. I want to address that point. I want to look at Bill 201 as it relates to leadership, real leadership in this House, as it relates to the potential savings, great savings.

If we look at the other world, the outside world, and talk in terms of any corporate structure, when they talk in terms of trying to demonstrate real budget restraint, they don't start at the lower end. They start at the top, and they start downsizing, rightsizing, whatever expression you want to use, where it counts. If you look at Telus and its reorganizational manoeuvres after it was privatized, many, many of the top people were gone. It was consolidated. You can look at Canadian Airlines, you can look at Safeway, you can even look at CBC, and you can find that the restructuring took place from the top and worked its way down. This government can sit back and it can argue, "Well, we decreased the number of members of cabinet." Yes, they did, a token measure from my point of view. They can talk in terms of a reduction of 5 percent in terms of the cabinet minister pay, in terms of the basic salary for all MLAs, 5 percent. But at the same time let's look at what government members did. Let's look at the restructuring and the forming of four new committees that took up a good portion of those savings. I believe every member on the other side of the House – if I'm wrong, correct me – gets extra pay well and above the basic \$54,000, one-third tax free, whatever it is now. I believe the minimum extra pay is – what? – in the neighbourhood of 13 grand extra, on top. Somebody help me. Is it 13 grand or is it 15 or is 17?

MR. CHADI: On that side it's about 25.

MR. WICKMAN: Twenty-five?

MR. CHADI: About that.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, when I went through public accounts from the previous year and I looked at the base salary and I looked at the names beside it. . .

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SPEAKER: Is the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat rising on a point of order?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Certainly. Imputing motives, false or unavowed motives: Standing Order 23(i), *Beauchesne* 484(3). There are certainly a number of members on this side of the House that do not get any extra money, and I'd ask that member to withdraw his comment.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, can I count them on one hand? Can I ask the good doctor if I can count them on one hand?

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order. [interjections] Order please. The Chair feels that if the hon. member has some information to present to the House, he should present it. He should not be making innuendos that certain things are the case that he has no knowledge of.

MR. CHADI: Oh, but he has knowledge.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, if he has knowledge, then he should put his knowledge forward and not use the smear paintbrush on other members.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the reference to all. I believe there are four that are exempt from that statement I made. Is it four? Yeah, it's four. We can table that document. We have that document, and it clearly shows that the average . . .

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. DAY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering in the spirit of openness if the member opposite would entertain a very brief question.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm not going to use up my 20 minutes that they keep interrupting by answering his questions. You'll get a chance, Stock. You just wait your turn. Okay?

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Let's talk in terms of the savings, looking at the reduction from 83 members to 65, a reduction of 18 MLAs. We look at the average cost per MLA, well over \$50,000: well over \$50,000 when you look at the various perks that go with the office. Then you turn around and you look at the constituency cost, and then you turn around and you look at the caucus cost, and you start looking at the whole package. Again, I can't give you an exact figure, but I would say that it probably costs the taxpayers of Alberta an average of what? About \$120,000, \$130,000, \$140,000 per MLA, somewhere in that ballpark, give or take a few dollars.

Then you start looking at the spin-off effects from there down, because when you start rightsizing at the top, it has tremendous impact as it goes down, down, down. Those some distance from the top have an easier fashion of handling what they're being asked to do. What are they being asked to do? Let's just put ourselves on the other side of the fence for a minute. Take a look at the health care worker. They look back and they say: "Well, what is the Premier really asking us to do? Take a 5 percent rollback?" No. The Premier is asking for considerably more than a 5 percent rollback. You go and you talk to health care workers, you look at the restraint on their budgets, and you look at what they're being asked to take in terms of a reduction. Then they look at this particular Assembly, and they say: "All those fat cats there, and we're being asked to sacrifice. We're being asked to cut down considerably, when all they've made are token manoeuvres to demonstrate fiscally responsible leadership at the top." That's from the health care worker's point of view.

Look at the educators. They're going to be making some announcement within the next few hours showing some type of position from their point of view, probably not too happy with what they're going to have to say. But they're squeezed in a particular position, because I assume representatives, when they met with the Premier, were pretty well told that there are certain things that are expected of them and not to look at what's happening here because this is a different kettle of fish. What we do doesn't really count as far as what they do, because they're asked to do certain things that we're not asked to do in this particular House.

We can look at the social workers, at the reduction of the number of social workers within the field and the caseload that they have. The average working caseload per social worker has to be tremendous, hon. member. It has to be tremendous when we look at the total number of files. Some have gone to B.C. Some have gone to Saskatchewan, Ontario, whatever. But there are still many here in Alberta that are on social assistance and other programs provided for by the provincial government. The number

of social workers that are there now to handle those cases decreases while the number of files increases.

We can look at the ALCB workers as they head out the door: no jobs left because of privatization, no consideration really given to them. How do you think they feel when they look back and see that there's an opportunity to save millions of dollars if this government took the lead of this opposition and went along on a free vote on Bill 201 and showed true leadership, tremendous leadership?

We can even break it down to the educators and the health care workers and the driver examiners: all these various people that are being affected by the new restraint being imposed by this government.

We can take it right down to the community level, to that little child in Boyle Street that has to go to school without any socks on because there is not sufficient money in that household to even buy the necessities, that goes to school without even having lunch unless there are volunteers that are compassionate enough to go out there and raise sufficient funds to buy them a hot lunch because they may not get supper when they go home that night because of the restraints that are being imposed on them by this government. How do you think that little child feels or those parents feel that cannot give their children the basic necessities, that are being asked to provide \$125 worth of additional items attached to education, like bus and books and such, being asked to do it on \$25? Five times the cost, and they're being asked to do it on \$25. They look back at this Legislative Assembly and say, "There's an opportunity to save millions and millions of dollars."

What about the woman in the west end that went to the Misericordia hospital with a broken leg, 9 o'clock in the morning, and was told: come back at 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon when we have somebody on staff that can attend to you; meanwhile, here are some painkillers. How do you think that lady feels when she looks at this Assembly and sees the government's refusal or lack of commitment to true fiscal responsibility by supporting initiatives that are brought forward? I can go on and on and on, and I can talk about how symbolic those millions of dollars in savings are throughout the entire field, tremendously, tremendously symbolic.

3:40

Then, Mr. Speaker, we can look at the other component. We can look at actual representation. The former speaker spoke about. . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, does the member just want to hold off for a few more minutes? He's going to be given the opportunity to get up there and give his spiel in 20 minutes like everybody else in this session.

When we talk in terms of representation, we look at 83 members within this Legislative Assembly, 83. We look at the population of Alberta. We look at other provinces like Ontario, British Columbia, and we talk in terms of representation per capita. I think we are very, very heavily, very overly governed in terms of representation. What's asked of us, to represent a few more people, shouldn't be that difficult. Look at the Members of Parliament, the number of constituents they have. You can even look at the municipal politics, at the civic level. You have 12 aldermen in the city of Edmonton representing the same number of people that we represent. You look at Calgary. You have – what? – 14 councillors in Calgary. You have 19 MLAs, I believe, or is it now 20? Representation that has gone up instead of going down. We can look at the school trustees. Mind you, they may not have anybody to represent pretty soon, because their jobs may be wiped out totally, not only reduced. It's possible that down the road we won't see any educational trustees at all. So we

talk in terms of representation, and we talk in terms of an approach that can be done by people that are not politically connected with the Legislative Assembly, to do it in a fair manner.

The Member for Stony Plain spoke earlier in terms of the last process that went through and made reference to some of the remarks that were made by members of this particular caucus. But when we look at that process that followed and the reference that was made to the riding of Edmonton-Whitemud, the riding of Edmonton-Mill Woods, and we look at my riding for example, Edmonton-Rutherford, and we look as to how it came to be that there is that connection between Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Mill Woods, that was not the recommendation that was brought forward by that commission that had been set in place. Those were amendments that were made in this House and approved by that side of the Legislative Assembly. They're the ones that effected that political process that gave a former member a supposed advantage that didn't pan out when that member had to seek renomination, to the good fortune of our very enlightened Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that is able to now make a really meaningful contribution in that he has a great deal to contribute to this House, a great, great deal. Members on that side should look over here with some envy and say, "What did we do to allow somebody with that talent, with that calibre to escape from their side over to our side?" You provided us with an opportunity that at that time you probably didn't realize you were doing.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, there are two points in this Bill that to me mean a great deal. One is the actual cost savings, not just the direct cost savings but the message it sends to the taxpayers, to all Albertans. Secondly, a much fairer, a more meaningful method of distribution of representation that affects all Albertans and makes for a much more fair process. I'm going to conclude on that note.

Oh, now the member's gone. The member who wanted to speak so desperately. I'm sorry. I shouldn't make reference to the fact that he's no longer here, but somebody over there will now have the opportunity to speak.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's with us in spirit.

MR. WICKMAN: With us in spirit? Unfortunately, he won't have the opportunity now to ask me that question that I was so eagerly looking forward to. On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against the Bill brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition, Bill 201. We can see that this Bill is quite a change in position for the Liberals since way back in 1992. I am surprised that they could make such a drastic turn in such a short time. To have two members of the Liberal caucus go on record during the electoral boundaries debate and say that the numbers should be increased, then introduce the Bill into the Legislature today, I find that remarkable. But wis is the kind of grandstanding we have come to expect from the Liberals. This week's actions by the opposition to grab media attention do little to improve the affairs of Alberta. They get on the news. If that is their purpose, then they have fulfilled their ambition. This Bill is another attempt at grandstanding. Reducing the number of seats is an academic debate, one that looks good on paper but is unworkable in reality, as illustrated by the Member for Calgary-Foothills.

It is unfortunate that the Liberal Party does not believe in real reductions to government spending now that the election is over.

There are some reductions that could be made. The Liberal leader is the highest paid opposition leader in this country. Their House leader is paid well above the average salary for opposition House leaders in Canada. Maybe these should be reduced. I remember the Liberal leader saying that salaries should be cut 10 percent in return for job security. We could cut his salary, but I certainly wouldn't guarantee him job security.

Why do the Liberals need a Calgary caucus allowance to pay for office space? The former opposition paid for an office out of their caucus budget, yet the Liberals fought for an extra \$47,000 to have an office in this city where they have three MLAs. Why do those members living in Edmonton need two offices? The Liberals obviously are concerned about effective representation. They fought to ensure that Edmonton MLAs could travel outside of Edmonton away from their constituents to represent others. Perhaps they should concentrate more on their own constituencies instead of using the taxpayers' money to travel this province.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

I would like to look at this issue from a rural perspective, but before I begin, I have a quote from one of the rural Liberal members. It was made during the Electoral Boundaries Commission's public hearings in Calgary on February 27, 1992. A presentation was made by the Three Hills Provincial Liberal Association. In the presentation the speaker states:

Why can't we change the number of electoral areas? Then we could solve all these kinds of problems. The cities could have a few more. We wouldn't object in the country as long as you leave us alone.

The message was clear. The Liberals in rural Alberta wanted the number of seats to be left alone, and now this urban caucus wants to reduce the number of seats.

I have just the solution. We'll take the seats out of urban areas such as Edmonton, where the citizens obviously would be happy to give them up. Edmonton has 18 MLAs but only 12 aldermen. Is their hon. leader saying that Edmontonians need 18 elected members when the Legislature is within their own city? Yet 12 city aldermen cover the affairs of the municipality effectively. Which MLAs in Edmonton would the Liberal leader like to cut from this Assembly? We'd have to take at least four to meet the opposition leader's goal. Perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford or Edmonton-McClung would give up their seats. Why don't we combine the constituencies of Edmonton-Norwood with Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly? We could make a case for community of interest and have one of these MLAs give up their seats. Then we will terminate either the Member of Edmonton-Manning or Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont so Edmontonians have a northeast MLA. We could also get rid of the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HENRY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do you have a point of order, Edmonton-Centre?

3:50

MR. HENRY: I was just wondering if the member would entertain a question from one of her former constituents.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question has been asked if you would accept a question.

MRS. GORDON: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Right. Thank you. Continue.

Debate Continued

MRS. GORDON: Oh, I forgot. The MLA for Calgary-Buffalo wants to increase the seats. The Liberal MLA for Calgary-North West also wants us to increase the number of seats. Perhaps the MLA from Lethbridge-East would offer his seat to his leader and leave the city of Lethbridge in the capable hands of my colleague from Lethbridge-West, all in the name of making intelligent cuts, of course.

Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the opposition leader to travel rural Alberta. In fact, if he'd like, he can come with me. The addition of people to his constituency involves the inclusion of a few blocks. He can walk the extra distance we would have to add to the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry, but to add to my constituency, to absorb the increase would involve hundreds of miles. I ask the opposition leader: which is more fair to the citizens of Alberta? Add hours of travel time to my already full week, or add a couple of neighbourhoods to his constituency that he could walk to on a Saturday morning?

I have to travel well over an hour by highway just to reach my constituency boundary. From my home and office in Lacombe it is a one and three-quarter hour drive to the residents at the eastern end of my constituency. From this Assembly the opposition leader is within 15 minutes of his every citizen. I have to represent three towns, seven villages, four hamlets, two hospital boards, two health units, three school boards, one college, two different counties, and several Hutterite colonies. Each of these councils and boards has different interests. How many different boards and councils does the Liberal leader have to represent?

Mr. Speaker, I do not even have the luxury of common interests in the same industry within my constituency. Agriculture is a pillar of the Lacombe-Stettler economy, yet the agriculture producers from the Stettler area vary greatly from the agriculture producers in the Lacombe area. I am fortunate my constituency is large, but many of my colleagues have more difficult areas to represent. Some MLAs have a five-hour drive home after the session. Look at the area covered by the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca. During the election his Liberal opponent admitted in the media that he would probably drive close to a hundred thousand kilometres during the campaign. That is during a 20-day writ period. What if we project that type of travel over a four-year term and throw the time in that we spend in Edmonton during session? To add to this constituency would make the riding nearly impossible to represent, but the Liberals want to increase the average population per riding to over 39,000. Do you realize that the combined population for the constituencies of Athabasca-Wabasca and Lesser Slave Lake would be 35,950, yet would cover over one-quarter of the province? The population would still be 9 percent below the provincial average, well within the 25 percent variance allowed by the court. How could a person representing that large an area do a quality job for their constituents?

As MLAs we spend much of our time ensuring that the regional differences within our constituencies are recognized. One of the biggest concerns I hear about regarding our Alberta MPs is that unless they happen to reside in your community, you never see them. Often we see one end of the constituency squared off against the other. The bitterness shows up during elections and even at nomination meetings. To promote this by increasing the areas we have to cover is against the goals of elected representatives.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals claim a reduction in the number of seats would save money. I agree that salary costs for the Legislat-

ive Assembly would decrease, but my constituency costs would increase dramatically. No matter how many MLAs sit in this Assembly, we have to communicate with 2.6 million citizens. Urban MLAs have the luxury of calling town hall meetings and having every constituent within easy access. To do the same job, I have to hold four or more public meetings so my constituents don't have to travel over an hour to get to the meeting.

Mr. Speaker, this issue boils down to one of effectiveness of representation. I believe rural Albertans expect more from their MLAs. They believe in personal contact when resolving issues. My constituency has three towns greater than a thousand people. These three towns only account for half of the people I'm committed to represent. The other 50 percent are spread throughout my constituency. To increase the size of my constituency would limit my ability to do the job I was elected to do.

We all hear that people want integrity in their elected representatives. I think the best way for us to restore integrity in this system is for each of us to get out and meet with those people who have elected us. I fear that reducing our numbers would jeopardize our ability to do just that. I encourage all members of this Assembly, especially the rural members from the Liberal opposition, to vote against this Bill. We have to establish the line between cost cutting and effectiveness. I believe that reducing the number of MLAs to 65 would go beyond that line.

Thank you.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to table this document. It's a document that was requested regarding the extra stipend paid government members. There are only 10 that do not receive an additional stipend.

MR. WICKMAN: Give us some examples, Michael.

DR. PERCY: Later. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order please. Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I listened to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills speak of the efforts of the initial committee to set up the boundaries, and I was struck by my own experience. I was not elected; in fact, I was door knocking at the time. Initially I was nominated to run in Edmonton-Parkallen, and Edmonton-Parkallen disappeared. Portions of it ended up in Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Strathcona, and Edmonton-Whitemud. I had been, then, knocking busily on doors in what was going to be the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Then the representation was made by the then incumbent, the hon. Doug Main, or the then hon. Doug Main, and lo and behold, a large number of doors that I had knocked on disappeared. But it was a nice advantageous constituency that had emerged subsequent to his submission in the sense of who would vote and where. I thought, "You know, gee, that didn't strike me as being fair in terms of the way the configuration was set up," but I still knocked on those doors with a positive effect.

The bottom line was it struck me as an outsider and as a novice that the subsequent changes to the boundaries were not necessarily fair, that there had been some shifts of polls and some shifts of areas that appeared to benefit a particular party at the expense of another or to concentrate votes within a particular constituency. I mean, it appeared, for example, just to the naive, to the novice like myself, when you looked at then Edmonton-Strathcona, that, gosh, there was a heavy concentration of New Democratic votes there that had been spread around in some of the other ridings, but

they were all concentrated there. It didn't do the incumbent very much good, I might add, but it did appear there was a clustering there. The same with Edmonton-Norwood, and look at Calgary-Elbow for a really peculiar constituency.

So the bottom line is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when you looked at the process, it did not appear to be eminently fair. That is why I support this proposal: because it puts it in the hands of the Chief Justice. Nobody on that side of the House or on this side of the House would dare infer anything about the integrity of that particular member of the judiciary. Eminently fair. He would have the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer. There are objections that have been made, and some of them sound very reasonable as to the time frame, as to the ability to do this. Those can be addressed through amendments, but I think the principle – and that's what I want to speak to – of downsizing has to start here.

4:00

Last night I spoke about the issue of accountability and voting for hospital boards because I think accountability really means that you vote for the people that spend your money. So, I mean, support the members on the other side who say, "We want effective representation," and surely that leads one, then, to support elected hospital boards, elected school boards. The issue, though, when it comes to election is . . . It appeared when you were downsizing. We're consolidating school boards. We're consolidating hospital boards. It seems that we can consolidate all of the levels of government, but we won't touch ourselves. I don't think that sends a very clear message about doing more with less. So I think if we are going to argue that we have to spend money more efficiently, that we have to consolidate, we should in fact start at the top.

In the rural areas – and I've heard many comments from the hon. members on the other side about the problems associated with downsizing the number of members and the potential for increasing the size of rural ridings as well as urban ridings. It's clear that increasing the size of rural ridings would cause problems, but I also think as we consolidate some of these school boards – there will be schoolchildren on buses for an hour and a half. The problems that we're inflicting on them didn't seem to generate much sympathy or support in this House. When we think of consolidating or reducing the number of hospitals, that hasn't elicited much sympathy on that side of the House.

So I would think that if we're going to be consistent on this and bear a little of the pain, we have to address the issue of: what do we do to downsize by 20 percent? There are real cost savings there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Two and a half million dollars will fund a lot of kindergarten; it will fund a lot of day care; it will do good in areas unrelated to the operation of this House. I think we ought to do more with less.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler brought up the issue of the urban ridings. Clearly, when this Bill came forward in the Liberal caucus, one issue that was debated was that possibly four of us are gone, but the issue of leadership means that you have to bear some of those costs. Similarly, in Calgary there might be four members gone, and certainly the odds are that they may be Conservatives. We're all going to bear the pain.

It's not a rural/urban issue as presented there. It is really an issue of government leading by example. As this government brings forward legislation consolidating school boards, without their consent I might add, when it brings forward legislation that will be consolidating hospital boards, without their consent I may add, surely then we should do the same here. Put it to an arm's-length board. Let that chief justice make the decision of what is fair, because again I do not think anybody in this House would

infer that the chief justice would do anything other than what is fair and what provides for a level playing field, particularly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when that chief justice can draw upon the skills of the Chief Electoral Officer. I mean, it has been painted by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler as some type of urban plot. It isn't. It's in the hands of the chief justice. Also, the Member for Calgary-North West has been quoted extensively, favourably I might add, regarding positions that he took when he was serving on a particular commission.

The issue is that things have changed. We are downsizing. That was then; this is now. People have accepted the Deficit Elimination Act. They've accepted that we have to do more with less. Suddenly it is that side of the House who wants to preserve the status quo. It is that side of the House that doesn't want change. It is that side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that views that they can impose change on others, but they're quite unwilling to accept it themselves. I don't think that is fair.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy has a point of order. Do you have a citation?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if the hon. member would entertain a quick question.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'll ask.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, are you prepared to entertain a question at this time?

DR. PERCY: No, I wouldn't, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Even though I know it would be a penetrating question, time is important. We want to make a number of points. I might add that the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills used a full 20 minutes in a very effective outline of her concerns of the Bill, and I would like to do the same.

Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: So to continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I look at this, then, as an issue of cost savings. I think 2 and a half million is a large amount of money. I look at this as an issue of leading by example, and I think this Legislature has to do that. I think, then, as the government side imposes change on other levels of government, as it downsizes other jurisdictions, it too has to do the same. So I really do believe that we have to make an example by downsizing, and 20 percent seems to be reasonable.

I look at British Columbia. The geographic configuration of British Columbia, particularly in the northern part of the province, is very similar to that of A l b e r t a . [interjections] I mean distance. They have, according to the numbers, 44,000 per riding. As well, nothing precludes the chief justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from taking into account the unique features of a particular area and allowing it to have a smaller number of people because of the geographic considerations. It's an open-ended invitation to the chief justice to do what the chief justice thinks is fair.

So for the hon. members on that side to impute motives to us, when in fact it is the chief justice who will be setting out the rules of the game, I think is unfair, almost hurtful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But we can take it. I really do think: why would one want to impugn what the chief justice is going to do? I don't think one ought to. I think you give the chief justice the responsibility and believe that the chief justice will do this in a way that is fair, that's consistent with the Charter of Rights, and that's consistent

with what will lead to fair and effective representation in this province.

So to conclude, I would like to make three points. First, I think there are real cost savings in this: 2 and a half million dollars in cost savings. Second, I think we have to lead by example, and if we are going to impose change on other levels of government, impose change on hospital boards, impose change on school boards, let us do the same ourselves and make it arm's length. The third point I would like to make is on this issue of costs of government. In response to requests from members across the way for a knowledge of who gets what and in the sense of freedom of information, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to read about some of the additional salaries that are obtained on the other side, because there was a request by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. So in answering a question from the other side, I would like to in a sense provide some of this material, and I have tabled the document. I won't deal with members of the cabinet because they do receive a stipend which is commensurate with their extra responsibilities.

I'll start with the hon. Member for Stony Plain. His position is of Whip, agenda and priorities committee of cabinet: an additional \$30,560. The hon. Member for Dunvegan is the Deputy Chairman of Committees, and that is an additional \$26,175. I'll jump down a little bit. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, chair of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission: an additional \$15,000. Not to forget the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the chair of the Alberta Research Council: an additional stipend of \$15,000. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the chair of the Council on Professions and Occupations: an additional \$15,000. I might add, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw gets nothing. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West is chair of the heritage savings trust fund: an additional \$4,200. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, the chair of the Private Bills Committee: \$4,200.

MRS. HEWES: Does he get a car?

DR. PERCY: No, I believe that's been canceled.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. members, I know that he may be plucking a nerve, but it isn't necessary to have the noise going back and forth. We are speaking through the Chair, and right now Edmonton-Whitemud does have the floor.

Edmonton-Whitemud.

4:10 Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Calgary-Mountain View, board of Syncrude Canada Ltd.: an additional \$15,000 a year. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti is chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council: an additional \$15,000 a year. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is chair of the Environmental Protection, Forests, Parks and Wildlife Advisory Committee: an additional \$15,000. The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross is chair of the Citizenship and Heritage Secretariat: an additional \$15,000.

Now, I'm not in any way inferring that the positions and work that they do is not of the highest quality and that their work is not of the highest integrity, but I am just stating that there is an additional cost of government that is involved here. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler brought this up, and I believe we have to air these facts.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, minister without portfolio . . .

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Little Bow, you have a point of order?

MR. McFARLAND: On relevance, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the order of relevance, this is relevant to the debate, I trust. The question had arisen to me as well. I know that someone else made a brief reference to a number of items, but yours is no longer brief. It is relevant, I take it. Pardon the question then.

Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in light of your polite injunction, then I will cease at this point. But I want to make the point that when we talk about cost savings, I can think of a very easy approach to generate some significant savings.

Thank you very much for your indulgence.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Little Bow, does that answer your point of order?

MR. McFARLAND: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: You have a further point of order, Little Bow?

MR. McFARLAND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought we were discussing electoral boundaries and not members' services and allowances. Whether we had fewer MLAs represented in this Assembly or not, we'd still have the committees. That has nothing at all to do with electoral boundaries. Perhaps while they're at it, if they are in fact referencing the committee makeup, they should reference the amount paid to the Leader of the Official Opposition for doing nothing: \$44,500.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you, hon. member. The Chair exercised a certain amount of lenience because earlier in the debate on this Bill several members to the right of Mr. Speaker did get into the detail of how much and who got what, so in that sense the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was not brought up on the point because it had been brought up earlier. I think we now have addressed the issue and are prepared to hear Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to speak against this Bill, but just before doing so, I'd like to ask the hon. member who just spoke if he would consider closing his constituency office down, which is just down the street from his office in the Legislature Annex, to save money. It would seem to be a logical and relatively quick way that we could save some money here.

AN HON. MEMBER: How about renting some space from you?

DR. L. TAYLOR: I would certainly rent space to anybody who is the highest bidder, except I would like to vet my tenants first, and they wouldn't qualify.

Mr. Speaker, last week after the throne speech the Liberal leader claimed that our government's job creation strategy of allowing the private sector to create meaningful jobs instead of government jobs, nonmeaningful type jobs, was a big lie. Well, this Bill is a big lie, and that's what I want to talk about today, the big lie of the members opposite.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

The Liberals are saying that the reduction of the number of seats by 20 percent will save the government \$2.5 million per year, and this is a laudable effort by the opposition party. But the Liberals are having a hard time comprehending that we're trying to save \$2.8 billion, Mr. Speaker. They fight our reductions, our restructuring in every area and attempt to save \$2.5 million. It simply doesn't make any common sense at all, which is typical. The entire budget for this Legislative Assembly, including the Auditor General, is \$40 million. If we were to eliminate this entire Assembly and all its offices, we would only fund our current health care system for 48 hours. We would only fund the big four for 34 hours, less than two days. The Liberal leader is correct in saying that the salaries to MLAs would be reduced by \$900,000 if we reduced the number of MLAs by 20, but that is where his logic ends.

I would like to remind the Leader of the Opposition of the intelligent cuts that have already been made in this Legislature. Cuts to postage allowances will save this Assembly \$191,000 next year. Caucus budgets have been reduced to save . . . [interjections] Please, Mr. Speaker, please.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Caucus budgets have been cut \$124,000. Prior to that meeting, the intern program was eliminated. This will save \$93,000 per year. Travel for family members and guests of MLAs will no longer be paid for. Former MLAs will no longer be reimbursed for trips to Edmonton. Allowances have also been eliminated for MLAs attending parliamentary conferences. So these are the examples of cuts that needed to be made, and we have made them: 30.9 percent. Plus I would point out that the Liberals receive an extra \$55,000 for an office in Calgary. There's a cut that could be made. Plus the leader allowance for the Liberal opposition is \$357,000. For what, I ask. For what?

What would reducing the number of seats do in Alberta? I would say that it would make each of our duties and responsibilities more difficult to fulfill, especially in rural areas. This is an attack by an urban opposition on the rural members. Now, I can understand why the urban Liberal caucus would support this Bill, but what astonishes me is that rural MLAs – for example, the members for West Yellowhead, Bonnyville, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, or Redwater – would even consider any support for this Bill at all. I trust they'll use their common sense and vote against it.

The members from Edmonton are fortunate. Their offices, both legislative and constituency, are within 15 minutes of this Assembly. I have a five-hour drive one way to get to my constituency office in its new location. Even the Member for West Yellowhead is fortunate. Despite the large area his constituency covers, he is a relatively short three hours from his farthest population centre. Eighty five percent of his population is compressed into four towns. The other 15 percent is usually within a short drive of these four major centres. But if we were to expand his constituency and use Highway 2 as his northern boundary, I would like him to stand and assure this Assembly that he could do an adequate job of representation. He couldn't.

Many of my colleagues from central and southern Alberta have large areas to cover, and the population is evenly distributed through the constituencies. These agriculture centres are difficult to represent because face-to-face contact is more difficult. Most of the contact tends to be done through the media, phone, or mail. Personally, I held approximately 10 meetings from the time the last session was over to the present session in rural communities, and I didn't come close to covering all my rural communities. Simply impossible.

4:20

As I mentioned earlier, some of the cuts that the Legislative Assembly has made are intelligent cuts that will not affect how we represent our constituents. The Liberals claim that reducing the number of MLAs would reduce the costs for MLA postage, phone, travel, office furniture, and supplies. Does the Liberal leader believe that with fewer MLAs we would have fewer Albertans to communicate with, we would have fewer letters to send out? We still have the responsibility to represent 2.6 million citizens. Reducing the number of MLAs will only mean that each MLA will mail out more, will make more contact. We have to answer the concerns of the citizens. We will make more long-distance phone calls, if you're in a rural riding. This will not diminish because we have fewer MLAs. People's concerns are still important to them.

Many of the rural MLAs would have to open extra constituency offices so people have access to their MLA. The person sitting next to me has had to do that, and I'm sure there are others that have had to do that as well. The Liberals do not recognize any of the costs associated with the extra offices in their proposed savings. One of the complaints of federal MPs is that they're unavailable. They represent approximately 93,000 people, and unless you live in the same community as the federal MP, you do not see him. Do we want to have this happen with our local MLAs? I would argue not.

Mr. Speaker, I agree that this Assembly can be run more efficiently and effectively. For instance, allowing cabinet ministers to respond and answer questions, instead of being drowned out by a barrage of nonsensical heckling from the opposite, would help this Assembly run more effectively. In the future we have to be able to represent people effectively through electronic means. This certainly will help us, and it will come, but people still want to talk to their MLA. They want to have that crucial personal contact, and I find it a negative comment to try and reduce that personal contact in any way.

We are already representing more people than before. In 1979 MLAs represented an average of just over 25,000 people. In 1982 they were responsible for just over 27,000. Today we represent over 32,000, so we are representing more people. The Liberals look at Saskatchewan and say: Saskatchewan is reducing the number of MLAs. I would point out that Saskatchewan is also reducing its population. They have the lowest population they've ever had since 1983. People are moving to Alberta because we have a low tax regime. That's where people want to be, where there is a low tax regime.

I have 14,000 electors in my constituency, 22,000 persons to represent. I realize that I'm at the lower end of the population scale, but to drive from one end of my constituency to another will take over three hours if you drive at highway speed, Mr. Speaker. My constituency extends past Burdett on Highway 3, right down to the American border, over to the Saskatchewan border, up to the Sandy Point bridge, and then follows the river back into Medicine Hat. An area of almost 10,000 square miles and the leader opposite wants me to represent a larger area. Totally amazing.

So I would encourage every member to vote against Bill 201, especially the rural members on the other side. Our job is becoming increasingly more difficult as our populations increase. I am part of a government that makes cuts based on a future plan, a long-term plan, not a short-term plan that is just set up to get public attention and media coverage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we're getting off on the wrong foot on this debate. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Calgary-West has the floor.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: We're talking about rural versus urban. I listened to the hon. Member for Medicine Hat-Cypress . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

. . . and how he has to go and meet all his constituents, and then my cousin from Medicine Hat tells me he can never get ahold of him. I explained to him that he's probably out trying to lease some office space.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, I lean towards the Bill. I'm prepared to listen to some of the arguments both for and against this Bill. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills brought up some arguments that were valid, but I think we as an Assembly in total have to look at what's happening. The electorate out there doesn't think much of politicians. We're having to make a lot of cuts, and I think we have to set an example.

Now, the arguments that were raised about rural Alberta would beg the question: why don't we have more MLAs if it's so difficult? I would submit to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat – I think I got it right this time – that if we did have fewer ridings, the drive wouldn't get any shorter down to Medicine Hat from Edmonton. That's the problem about having a large province. The drive is still going to be five hours from Medicine Hat to Edmonton, and he knew that when he ran. Now, I'm sympathetic. I really am sympathetic to the fact that rural members have a large geographic area to cover. I don't care for the arguments: I think in Edmonton we should merge this riding with that riding. I'd like to point out to the Member for Stony Plain that when these boundaries were set up, they were largely represented by the party of his previous persuasion. It had nothing to do with the fact that the Liberals have them all now.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That's the point I was making, if you'd listen.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Well, it was kind of difficult to listen.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I think the point here is that some cuts have been made and – I've made this point before – we're not opposed to cuts. We know there's a problem. The thing we seem to forget is who caused these problems. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones and just get on with the job at hand, but we can't set this trend for making these cuts without setting an example. I've heard the argument: well, why don't you give up your riding? If that's what it takes, that's what it takes. I'm fully prepared to give up my riding, if it gets cut out, and run in another area. Maybe I'll run in Cypress-Medicine Hat. [interjections]

If I could just speak for a moment. In Calgary, for example, we've got 12 aldermen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Wrong. Fourteen.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Fourteen aldermen. I stand to be corrected. I was thinking of the 12 that are still remaining from the last election. Anyway, if you go by the levels of government, we've got 20 MLAs. I don't think Calgary needs 20 MLAs. I don't think Edmonton needs 18 MLAs.

Now, rural Alberta . . .

4:30

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. I regret to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-West, but Standing Order 8(5)(b) states that all questions must be decided to conclude debate on a private member's public Bill which has received 120 minutes of debate at second reading. The Chair has just received a signal that those 120 minutes have expired, so it is now required of me to put the following question. All those in favour of second reading of Bill 201, Electoral Boundaries (Reduction) Act, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Motion defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:32 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Sapers
Beniuk	Henry	Sekulic
Bracko	Hewes	Taylor, N.
Bruseker	Kirkland	Van Binsbergen
Carlson	Langevin	Vasseur
Chadi	Leibovici	White
Collingwood	Massey	Wickman
Dalla-Longa	Mitchell	Yankowsky
Decore	Nicol	Zariwny
Dickson	Percy	Zwozdesky
Doerksen		

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw cannot take his place at this stage during the vote.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I was already here.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member was not in his place at the commencement of the vote. The hon. member will have to remove himself from his place and go where he was at the beginning of the vote.

Against the motion:

Ady	Fischer	McClellan
Amery	Forsyth	McFarland
Black	Friedel	Paszowski
Brassard	Fritz	Renner
Burgener	Gordon	Rostad

Calahasen	Haley	Svertson
Cardinal	Herard	Sohal
Clegg	Hierath	Stelmach
Courts	Hlady	Tannas
Day	Jacques	Taylor, L.
Dinning	Kowalski	Thurber
Dunford	Laing	Trynchy
Evans	Mar	Woloshyn
Totals:	For - 31	Against - 39

[Motion lost]

Bill 202

Alberta Task Force on Education Act

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to second reading of Bill 202, a Bill entitled Alberta Task Force on Education Act.

Mr. Speaker, I think the best way to start explaining this Act is to in fact just very briefly read the principle that is enunciated in the Act. The principle of this Act as set out in section 3 says:

Education must help all Albertans develop to their fullest individual potential and must be viewed as a recurring lifelong activity.

4(1) The Task Force will conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of the current educational environment and the future educational needs of Albertans. The scope of the review shall include all aspects of education from the pre-school level through to post-secondary education, adult education, apprenticeship and industry training.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it hasn't been since 1969 in this province that an analysis, a thorough analysis, has been done of the educational system of our province. In fact, it was an Albertan well known at that time and still at this time that chaired the assessment of the then educational system. In 1969 the government of the day asked Wally Worth, who had a distinguished career as an educator in Alberta, to conduct an inquiry as to Alberta's needs, to do an assessment of what was then in place and to plan and to scope out an agenda for the future.

It will be of interest for the members of this Assembly to note that Dr. Worth and his commission looked at the issue of voucher education in 1969. That commission talked about year-round schooling, assessed year-round schooling. The commission talked about co-ordinating distance education courses. The commission laid out a mandate for Access, a mandate for Access which would have a very thorough and complete distance education program for Albertans and saw in Access the ability to have a centre for technological innovation into the future. It's unfortunate that the government allowed Access not to complete the mandate, fulfill the mandate that was envisaged by the Worth commission. It will be of interest to note that the Worth commission recommended kindergartens for Alberta, that the Worth commission addressed the issue of accessibility and talked about the problems that would be faced by the postsecondary institutions of Alberta with respect to accessibility. In other words, here is what we think is going to happen in terms of students wanting access to postsecondary institutions – and institutions, this is how you better get yourself ready for that onslaught – and it talked about a plan to co-ordinate postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't a system, this isn't a mechanism that's new to the Canadian way of life. There are many, and most provinces in Canada have these thorough reviews of education from time to time. It is of note that the Worth commission, which was set up in 1969, reported in 1972. So it's 22 years since the report came forward, and much indeed has happened to Alberta in

terms of its growth, in terms of changes to the economic system, in terms of changes to postsecondary institutions and so on.

The Act contemplates that the commission will have representation from people who are consumers of education – and the Act defines what a consumer will be, is – and it says that these consumers in conjunction with providers of education will participate in and make up the commission. The Act sets out that there will be not less than 14 members and sets out exactly where these 14 members will be appointed from; that is, the sector or the area that they'll be appointed from. It talks about the fact that the commission will be required to conduct hearings, to travel about Alberta, and to listen and hear and to report from Albertans to this Assembly on what the future of education for Alberta should be.

4:50

Now, Mr. Speaker, why do we need this? Well, there are a number of issues that I think all of us can recite, and perhaps our memories need to be refreshed on some of those issues. Access to education is a serious problem in Alberta. Last year the Liberal opposition noted that over 20,000 Albertans who were qualified to participate in postsecondary institutions couldn't; they couldn't get into those colleges and technical schools and universities. I need to remind members of this Assembly of the experience that I had just a week ago. In fact, I talked about this yesterday. When I was in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury and attended the agricultural college there, I learned that of every three people who apply to the college, only two are accepted. I learned that money is a problem for students attending the college, that some better methods of money resources need to be made available to allow students to go to that college. What a fine college it was, and what a great opportunity to build on Alberta's tremendous strength in agriculture to have young men and young women coming out of that college being able to be first in the world in terms of their education.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

But that's an access problem. People are being turned away from institutions, and yes, they have to go out and flip hamburgers, unfortunately, or find some other kind of part-time employment or find no employment. I don't think that's what Alberta legislators want to see. They want to see students attain the best and the highest possible education that a student can attain. So access is a problem.

Decision-makers – and I'm talking about decision-makers in postsecondary institutions as well as in government and this Assembly – need to be able to determine what's going to happen 10 years or perhaps 20 years from this date. Just as the Worth commission had to deal with the issue of access and scope that out for two decades, this Assembly and decision-makers need to know what's facing Alberta. Are we going to have another huge onslaught of students wanting to participate in postsecondary institutions?

As a side issue to access, I think that everybody in this Assembly, and certainly the hon. members from Red Deer and Grande Prairie, will know that there is tremendous pressure that comes from their communities to have degree-granting status, at the college in Grande Prairie or at the college in Red Deer and, some even argue, at the colleges in Lethbridge and in Medicine Hat. That's the kind of issue that needs to be assessed. We need to get experts, we need to get communities, we need to get those consumers and those providers to properly deal with that issue.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, for the commission to look at partnerships. Partnerships, in my view, need to be created,

partnerships between business and labour and the school system. This is a very different world, a very different Alberta than it was 20 years ago, and there's a lot of pressure on business and a lot of pressure on labour unions to participate, to be part of the providing of solutions to problems. Many people in Alberta see that provision of those solutions involving them directly in a partnership process. I think it's worth noting that the government has either consciously or unconsciously marginalized labour, angered labour, and you need to bring them into the discussion.

Mr. Speaker, nobody can disagree with the fact that the economy has changed considerably since 1972, when the Worth commission reported. The Conservative government has spent billions of dollars attempting to diversify Alberta, with no great success. It was believed in 1972, and in the '70s under the leadership of Premier Lougheed, that this initiative would take Alberta in a new economic direction, a very different direction. Well, that hasn't happened. A lot of money has been used, some squandered, some negligently used. Nonetheless, taxpayers' moneys have not provided success in seeing Alberta's economy diversified. So we need to accept that fact, accept the fact that we are still a commodity-trading province, that most of our exports are those primary products and the upgrading of those primary products, and we need to have an education system that perhaps acknowledges that or thinks about diversification in the future. I don't know. I'm just simply pointing out that somebody has to think about the future and what's likely to happen in the future.

We need to accept as another background factor the need to match our social perspective; that is, education must serve Albertans intellectually, socially, physically, and, most importantly, vocationally.

Mr. Speaker, the Act provides for these assessors – that is, the providers of education and the consumers of education – to be people other than legislators. I think that's an important point to make in this Assembly. The process that the government used in the roundtables was a sham. It was selective. In fact, it was ignored, by and large, by the Minister of Education and the minister of advanced education. It's necessary to have a real dialogue with Albertans, a real consultative process, and this allows for that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, another factor that is part of the need for this commission is to look at the curriculum that is being taught in our schools and the technology that is being employed in our institutions. It was a year ago when we saw that students studying mathematics in a state in the United States were doing better than Alberta students, and when Alberta students were compared with students in Japan in mathematics, we did worse than those students as well. Well, why? What's the reason for that? Is the curriculum wanting? Is the manner of delivery of that curriculum wanting? I think it's necessary to invite the ATA and parents and experts in the field to say, "Here's the way curriculum can be beefed up, and here's the kind of technology that you need to think about to ensure that we have the best educated men and women in the world."

I think the record is clear, Mr. Speaker, that if you asked the government exactly how much money was being spent on research and development in our province, nobody could answer that question. I don't think the government could answer the question of how much money should be spent on research and development. What sort of integration does this factor of research and development have in an education system? Is it important? If it is important, how important is it? Should there be a fixed sort of percentage that's applied and we see the establishment of a certain amount of research and development in our school system? Well, we don't even have that, and that's necessary.

5:00

We need to be able to look at standards. We need to ensure that there's a method of monitoring the curriculum and the teaching methods and the success at postsecondary levels and from K to 12, and I don't think, in my own view, that there is that proper ability to assess. We need as another factor the ability to monitor, to see if institutions are reporting to the decision-makers – and I'm talking about the MLAs in this Assembly and the government in particular – whether there's a proper monitoring mechanism that's put into place so that we can see that the plan is being followed.

I'm disturbed when I see a government backing off on real decision-making in terms of how it wants to cut back resources to education and it simply says in a global way, "University of Alberta," for example, "you're going to have so much cut out of your budget," and the government stands back and watches a battle take place between faculties or between departments. After the smoke clears and the debris is removed, what has happened is the likelihood that a dental faculty is lost, goes down, or a quarter of an education faculty, a faculty that has taken many years to be established, is, I think, irreparably harmed. Is that part of planning? Is that part of the government's intended planning process? I think not. I think a commission needs to say what it is that we need for Alberta now and into the future, and does a dental faculty fit into that scheme of things? I think a government has to say where an education faculty fits in terms of the colleges and the other universities, and are we hurting the U of A Faculty of Education by gutting 25 percent out of that system? Mr. Speaker, you're an individual who should know something about this, because that in fact is your background. So I'm sure that you'll vote in support of this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to do some real planning. It's time to have the analysis and the data that will allow for that real planning. It's time to say that the dog-eat-dog kind of process that allows universities or programs or parent/teacher groups to chew each other up shouldn't happen, that we think through this thing, that we work through this thing, that we plan through this thing, and that in the end Alberta is served by the best educational system in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that this Bill we have before us this afternoon came as no surprise to me. I say that because Bill 202 is just one more example of how this member is content to have his eyes firmly ensconced in the rearview mirror, while this government and the rest of Alberta for that matter have their eyes on the horizon aimed at a bright and prosperous future. The opposition continues to cling with dogged determination to the past. Our Premier has had the vision, the strength of character, and the resolve to ensure that the changes that this province requires in fact are carried out.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 would create yet another commission to determine the course of education in Alberta. This task force would consist of members of the education system along with Albertans from all other areas of Alberta society, and the task force would consult extensively with Albertans to help them in the determination of the future of education in this province. It's true. Does this sound remarkably familiar to anyone here today? Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't the government just finish two years of consultation with Albertans concerning education in Alberta? It seems that the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry has

once again dipped into his favourite political handbook, the efficiency audit and its 1,001 faces. It seems that for a party where there is little in substantive policies available, the efficiency audit has become the cure-all for political problems.

Mr. Speaker, this government will not allow the opposition to delay it from achieving Alberta's goal. That goal is to make Alberta a prosperous society, where the people receive quality, efficiency, and effectiveness from every cent of each tax dollar given to the government, a society that has quality education, health, and social services equally available to all Albertans. Where the opposition wishes to wait and study, this government will act. Where the opposition wants to spend away the future of our province, this government will be fiscally responsible by reducing the pressure created by the debt and the deficit on our children and our children's future. The time for audits is over. It is now time for action.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 is a massive waste of taxpayers' dollars. Alberta Education has already consulted extensively with Albertans, a process that lasted for more than two years. Consultation began in August of 1992. Six meetings were held to initiate discussion on the effect that the current fiscal situation of the province would have on the education system. School boards and superintendents from all but six of the operating school boards in the province participated in those discussions.

The department also engaged in the fiscal realities meetings with interest groups in the education field. Participants included the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta School Business Officials' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, as well as educational groups, parental associations, and the business community at large. In all over 300 members of the education community gave their input to the Department of Education.

Further, Mr. Speaker, a series of regional roundtables were initiated in the fall of 1993. These eight meetings were conducted to discuss education funding and education capital planning. Almost 600 people representing school boards, schools, teachers, municipalities, and the business community were involved in those discussions.

In October of 1993 Alberta Education sponsored two provincial roundtables on basic education held in Edmonton and Calgary. Representation at those meetings cut across all sections of society and the educational field with over 250 participants.

The minister also accepted reports from many local meetings and roundtables, as well as over 17,000 written submissions representing 31,000 Albertans, comprehensive written submissions from groups such as the Calgary Catholic separate school board, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta School Business Officials Association, Albertans for Quality Education, and the Alberta Teachers' Association amongst many others.

Mr. Speaker, this input provided through a broad consultation process was used as the basis to develop the plan for restructuring education in Alberta that this province has begun to put in place.

Bill 202 is about listening to Albertans. Well, this government has already made this a daily part of its governing. It is our job to ensure that we listen to Albertans and act on what they have told us.

In June of 1993 the people of Alberta made it quite clear what they thought of the way that government spends their money. They elected a government committed to eliminating the deficit and reducing the debt. The people of Alberta told this Legislature that our number one priority should be preparing Alberta for the future by creating a dynamic and strong economy, an economy that does not tax the businesses and the people of this province into a deepening recession. Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta

also told Premier Ralph Klein to eliminate the deficit, reduce taxes, and create an environment that would create jobs without government intervening in their lives. This government has and will continue to make this its mandate. We will not let the members opposite deflect us from the mission that the people of Alberta have asked us to complete.

5:10

It is plainly evident, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 202 will not accomplish anything that is not already being done. Therefore, the aim of this Bill must not be so readily apparent. Bill 202 more than anything else would delay the restructuring of the education system. While the opposition practises stalling tactics, this government is indeed restructuring and reorganizing the education system so that every child in Alberta will have access to an equal high-quality education. We believe that change is necessary in the continuing evolution of our educational system.

Fiscal equity is a problem that our consultations with Albertans showed is the number one priority when considering education. The current system of funding in education creates have and have-not schools. While some boards are running with a surplus, others are barely getting by or are getting further behind. This situation is unacceptable if we are to ensure equality in the education system. In fact, the opposition has spoken out on the problem of fiscal equity. Their plan was to increase provincial funding to 80 percent. Mr. Speaker, I would remind them that there is only one taxpayer in the province of Alberta, and this would result solely in increasing taxes.

Through the consultation process Albertans told us that they did not want higher taxes. They did, however, want the fiscal inequity problem solved. Not everyone agreed on how that would be done, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge that. But through the pooling of funds for education, the government will evenly distribute funding to school boards on the basis of what is required to provide a quality education. Funding will recognize the differences in the cost of providing education so that a quality education will be available in every corner of the province. Instead of blindly dumping in more money, this government is attempting to deal with the problem, not just treat the symptoms.

Over the past two years, Mr. Speaker, and especially in the last few months Albertans have told the government that they were concerned about the size of the proposed budget cuts to education. Many Albertans thought that 20 percent was simply too much to cut from the budget and that the quality of education must be maintained. Well, after consultation with Albertans we decided that Education would take the smallest cuts of any department in government. The Education department will only take a 12.4 percent cut over the four-year period from 1992 to 1996.

The restructuring of the education system will allow for substantial savings in the cost of administering education in this province. This government will ensure that the bulk of education spending is aimed at the classroom. We will streamline the operation of the educational system. Where there is duplication of services, we must find ways to eliminate those duplications. We will remove inefficiencies, we will remove waste, we will cut down on the bureaucracy, and we will have a less costly, superior quality of education available to every child in this province.

Mr. Speaker, in public discussions and consultations over the past number of years there's been very strong input from Albertans that there are too many school boards. Many of these school boards are in jurisdictions with fewer than 500 students. Reducing the number of school boards from 142 to about 60 will result in reduced administrative costs and increased efficiency in the education system. This reduction in administration costs will help reduce the impact on the classroom.

I am sure that the people of Alberta do not want us to waste our money on committees. They have asked us to make government less of a burden on society, not more. It is not a prudent use of taxpayers' money to delay actions that will reduce the deficit. It is not a prudent use of taxpayers' money to create committee after committee doing efficiency audits for no reason other than it's the political buzzword of the day. Most of all, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that this task force would serve a productive purpose as it simply duplicates a process that has been on-going for over two years.

Bill 202 does not address any of the problems that are facing education today that are not already being addressed. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this Bill actually does nothing constructive at all. The opposition wants to create a task force that will not report for over a year and a half. The people of Alberta have already told us what they want. They want us to act now to ensure their future.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am unable to support Bill 202, and I urge all members of the Legislature to reject this proposal because it is a waste of taxpayers' money and it does not deal with the problems confronting Albertans today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of the Bill. I would like to maybe preface my comments with some remarks to the Member for Olds-Didsbury. The roundtables for advanced education alone cost half a million dollars, and the member might be interested in reading some of the conclusions that his colleague the Minister for Advanced Education and Career Development managed to put out from those roundtables. Two of them are rather important. People at those roundtables told the government: first of all, they didn't have adequate time to make the decisions that they were being asked to make; secondly, they told people at those roundtables that they didn't have the information they needed on which to make the decisions. So time and no information characterized the roundtables. To claim that that process serves the students of this province is to deceive.

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about what I see as some of the concerns and some of the work of the task force that we've proposed. I think it has to be concerned with forecasts, forecasts about this province and what is happening and what is likely to happen in the next 20 years. There's been a vast change. If we look at some of the social changes in the province and across our country since the last look at education, 19 percent of Alberta families at the current time are led by lone parents; 8 percent of Alberta families are common-law unions. This is a dramatic change from the '60s, when the Worth commission looked at our province. If you look at work in the province, the number of part-time jobs has grown and the number of people having to take jobs that don't match their training or their aspirations has grown too.

Intergroup relations, a problem that was never very large in our province, has loomed large. We see immigrant groups being pitted against resident groups and difficulties arising in terms of crime. In recent surveys that have been taken, crime is a concern for people in the province, particularly in urban areas, and increasingly so.

There's been a disillusionment, cynicism with our political institutions. Jeffrey Simpson in *Faultlines* I think summarized it fairly succinctly. He said that politicians and political leaders have become irrelevant to Canadians. So there has been a change in terms of public perceptions and their faith in their institutions, and I think one of the things that this task force could do would be to

help restore that by bringing a measured look at the social conditions and the educational programs in the province.

We're facing a growing concern for alcoholism, drug use, and a new problem that's now on the horizon, gambling, and resources from the province being diverted into those areas. So social change, growing social problems, changing social problems would be part of the things that I think a commission might look at.

There's been a change in our population. The Alberta that many of us grew up knowing has changed rather dramatically. Forty-one percent of Albertans now claim a language other than English or French as their native language. That is a large change. There's been a dramatic shift of the province's population to the urban areas. The urban areas in our province contain almost 80 percent of the province's total population.

5:20

Economically, there have been again some changes that I think such a task force would want to look at. Personal income and personal income tax has grown. We as a province now spend about 22 percent of our income on personal income tax. There's been a change in the provincial income. The kinds of income that we depended upon in the past are changing, with forestry being developed, and I think that one of the tasks of this task force would be to look at that economic landscape and to try to make some predictions and to try to point some directions for us that have implications for the education system.

Our economic values have changed. We have television. We have a society telling our young people that tangible goods are the things that they should value. New cars, new jewelry, travel: those are the things that you should be seeking in our society. At the same time, we're not allowing 18- to 24-year-olds, to whom those messages are often aimed, to be gainfully employed and to gain the income that would allow them to secure those assets. For 15- to 24-year-olds the unemployment rate across the country is 27 percent, and that's a vast change from the time when young Albertans could walk out of a school classroom and take up almost any job they wanted. Unemployment has changed. There are part-time jobs, the growing number of women in the work force, and, as I mentioned, chronic unemployment for young people.

The task force I think would look at technological trends. If you look back at the Worth report - its proposals for Access have already been mentioned. Access, when it was created in the previous report, had a much wider vision of its role than what we have seen carried out by the Access television people. They talked even then of a communication highway in the province, the need for interactive television, the need for schools to gear up and be ready to use information and retrieval systems. They talked about technology in the home, those of us now experiencing interactive television being able to sit at home and use our television sets to pull up the news of the day in extended format, to use our home television to communicate with our friends and neighbours. They talked of the use of computers, and no one, even the computer makers, could predict that personal computers would be used so extensively for word processing.

We need someone to take a long and measured look at how those computers might be best used in our classrooms. If you have the privilege of visiting schools, as many of us have, you'll find that there's great variation, from schools where every youngster has a computer or access to a computer to others where they're scheduled in to computer use for just minutes a week. I think we want someone to look very carefully at technology. Archie Graham said: when technology is fused to progress, it continues on as if it were a utopia. That would be the end result. I think that's something that bears a serious second look. Will

technology really create the kind of Utopia that many expect it will in our schools?

So I think there are a number of forecasts that they need to look at Mr. Speaker: social changes, the social problems, our population, the economic climate in the province, the values that we have, and the economic values that we're passing on to our young people. They have to look at employment in the province, and I think they should look at the technological trends and try to make some forecasts, try to lay some groundwork for the future. Once they have established those forecasts, I'd submit that it's time for them to start to look at some alternative directions for us.

I think they have to have Albertans and consult widely with Albertans to establish the goals of education in this province. Right now there is a great deal of confusion about what the education system is supposed to be. The kind of planning or lack of planning is causing distress right across the province. We've had the opportunity to visit Lethbridge, Bow Island, some places in the southern part of the province, some time in Fairview and Grande Prairie, some time in Lloydminster, and the concern is constant. There is anxiety about the education system: what's going to happen to our schools, where are they going, what are they supposed to accomplish, and how are they going to be able to accomplish their goals when there isn't a clear direction established for them? So I think there needs to be a clear direction from all Albertans, not just those selected to attend roundtables; all Albertans need to have a say in establishing some clear goals for our schools.

I think we have to look, in particular, at postsecondary education and those institutions. At the present point in time those institutions have been set at each other. They're looking at each other's territory and they're trying to grab as much as they can, because they fear for the dollars they aren't going to have and they look at taking over someone else's territory as maybe one possible solution for their problems. That's no way for adult education to progress in this province. So we need to look at the colleges and the institutes. We have to have a look at the universities, at private schools and see how they fit together, how they can best serve students, how they can best serve adults who want to secure the benefits of those institutions.

I've been passed a note, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has moved that we adjourn debate. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]

