

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 13, 1994**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 94/04/13

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Will the committee come to order, please.

head: Main Estimates 1994-95

Community Development

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would the minister like to say a few words to start.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, colleagues. When I last rose in this House, I believe we were talking about some of the economic and social benefits provided through the Department of Community Development. The last matter that I spoke to was with respect to the international attention that comes to Alberta from its homegrown artists and through our important arts and cultural industries.

I want to talk briefly about Alberta books that tell Alberta stories and spread Alberta images around the world. NeWest press has just celebrated its 15th anniversary by releasing its third anthology of Alberta fiction. It's called *Boundless Alberta* and like its predecessors, *Alberta Bound* and *Alberta Rebound*, is selling very well. In fact, it will soon sell out its first printing. Television productions like *North of 60* and *Destiny Ridge* also promote Alberta abroad. Public relations value alone of the arts activity, supported or stimulated by my department, far outweighs its costs. That public relations benefit is only one benefit of many.

The second greatest expenditure under program 2, community services, is for libraries: \$13.089 million combined for library services activities and library operating grants. I have touched upon the importance of libraries in my earlier comments made on March 10, and let me add this thought as well. The so-called information highway is under construction all around us. For many communities libraries may be the only chance to have an interchange or an entrance ramp on that information highway at a time when information is the key to success at home and abroad.

As part of program 3, which covers cultural facilities and historical resources, Alberta Community Development operates 18 historic sites and museums that have significant economic impact on the provincial economy. Larger museums like the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the Royal Tyrrell Museum, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, Reynolds-Alberta Museum, the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, and the Remington-Alberta Carriage Centre all have measurable annual economic impacts in the millions of dollars. Original communities around Drumheller, Fort Macleod, Wetaskiwin, Cardston, Edmonton, Vegreville, and Mundare are developing tourism industries based on the ability of our historic sites to draw visitors from all over Alberta, Canada, and abroad. However, even smaller sites like Fort George-Buckingham House, Dunvegan, and Frank Slide generate significant tourism dollars for their local communities, thereby playing an integral role in Alberta's attempts to diversify our tourism industry throughout the province. All of these attractions are based on important historical assets which reflect the character and uniqueness of Alberta. They make a significant contribution to the preservation of our identity and our heritage. However, they are also vital entrepre-

neurial opportunities for the province and for the partnerships we set up and stimulate in their host communities.

You know, when the province of Alberta built the Jubilee auditoriums in Edmonton and Calgary a generation ago, many people questioned the value of such facilities. Yet when Ed and David Mirvish opened Canada's first privately financed commercial theatre in Toronto last year, they said that their achievement would not have been possible if facilities like the Jubilee auditoria, Toronto's O'Keefe Centre, and others had not been built in the 1950s and '60s. It takes time for sophisticated entrepreneurial enterprises to mature. Cost accountants have a concept that is relevant here: opportunity cost is defined as, quote, the benefits forgone by not choosing an alternative course of action, close quote. Think of the cost to Alberta and the Alberta advantage today of not having built the Jubilee auditoria 35 years ago or the cost to the Alberta advantage tomorrow of not maintaining world-class cultural and historical sites, facilities, and industries now. Careful cost accountants consider opportunity costs when they evaluate alternative investments, and so do we.

Program 4 covers individual rights and citizenship services. This is another area that we should look at in terms of quality of opportunity and opportunity cost. What is the opportunity cost to Alberta and the Alberta advantage of not coming to terms creatively and productively with challenges to diversity and human rights? We do not have to look very hard or very far to find examples of communities and societies that are paying the price for not having resolved those issues. Social and political stability are the essence of the Alberta advantage. We all live, of course, in times of rapid change. We all feel disoriented, insecure, and uncertain at times about the future. It can be hard, when we feel that way, to reach new perceptions and understandings that involve more change. Programs and agencies that foster new perceptions and understandings in the face of challenge are valuable, Mr. Chairman. That is why we have an Alberta Human Rights Commission and the Citizenship and Heritage Secretariat.

Women and seniors have special concerns. We do not view them as special interest groups. They are an integral part of the Alberta advantage. Women play a vital role in the economy as workers and as entrepreneurs, and they play a vital role in society as family members and caregivers. Seniors are a link with our past and play an important role in our present as volunteers and contributors to the local community. Change presents special challenges for both groups. The Women's and Seniors' Secretariat and my two advisory councils play a part in assessing change and its impact on women and seniors. They also give advice and information to help seniors and women meet the challenges and help government respond to needs through its programs. We do this through partnerships with organizations representing women and seniors and for seniors through the proposed Alberta seniors' benefit program.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn briefly to the answers to some of the questions which I did not have time to give at our last meeting. First a question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. That member wanted to know why the costs of the current review of the Human Rights Commission and the Individual's Rights Protection Act, which he estimated at between \$190,000 and \$240,000, are coming out of the commission's budget rather than special funding. In fact, the human rights review is costing about \$100,000. The funds are coming from both the commission's and Community Development's operating budget.

Next, there were several questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore. First the hon. member wanted to know about the impact of a \$2.4 million cut in management and

operations, line 2.1, page 59 of the estimates book, and of a \$26.4 million reduction in the total operating expenditure line on the same page. The reduction referred to takes place over two years. The reduction in this budget year is from \$9.861 million to \$9.332 million, or a reduction of \$529,000. We are reducing the manpower budget by 5 percent and cutting an additional nine positions, three of which were from the revolving fund. Transferring the Percy Page Centre to the proposed Alberta sport, recreation, parks, and wildlife foundation will also save money. Funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts from lotteries is not being reduced. Total funding to libraries and library systems is not being reduced. Recreation and sport funding will be transferred to the Alberta sport, recreation, parks, and wildlife foundation. The community recreation/cultural grant program ended in 1992-93 as scheduled. The impact was minimized by reducing grants gradually over several years.

The hon. member also wanted to know what was being lost as a result of a \$24 million reduction on line 2.2, financial assistance, under program 2, expenditures for community services. The question compares 1992-93 actuals with the 1994-95 estimates. The 1994-95 reduction is from \$22.375 million to \$15.549 million, or a reduction of \$6.826 million. The 1994-95 reductions come from shifting urban parks operating grants to Municipal Affairs and reducing municipal recreation/tourism area operating grants by 25 percent. Shifting urban parks operating grants to Municipal Affairs will make delivery of municipal grants more effective and efficient. We expect operators of municipal recreation/tourism areas to work closely with our community services field office staff to develop the kind of community-based, community-driven activity I've talked about earlier.

The hon. member also asked for clarification of several points on the Alberta seniors' benefit program. The proposed Alberta seniors' benefit program puts money in the hands of seniors who need it the most. We are talking with individual seniors and seniors' organizations to answer their questions and provide detailed information on the program. We recognize the proposed Alberta seniors' benefit may not cover all circumstances previously covered by extended health benefits.

8:10

Seniors are particularly concerned about high dental costs, and we are looking at ways to deal with that.

Senior couples where one member is not yet 65 will not lose renter's assistance and assured income if their collective income is over \$10,631. We have not changed the rule in this situation. The nonsenior spouse has never received Alberta assured income plan benefits. To use the member's example, a one-senior couple with a base income provided to such a couple by the federal government would receive a benefit of \$2,582 under the proposed program, giving them a total tax free income of \$13,213 plus continued premium free health care.

The hon. member asked if we were backing away from support promised earlier for the Multiculturalism Commission. The Multiculturalism Commission will continue to be supported by the staff and resources of the Citizenship and Heritage Secretariat. While the resources have decreased, the services will continue.

Finally, the hon. member asked for a statement of commitment to individual rights and the so-called citizenship services and of support for the continuance of the secretariat and commission under Community Development. As shown in the three-year business plan of the department, the secretariat and the commission remain under my ministry and will continue to function and serve a very important role for this government.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont wanted clarification on several points including how much of the money budgeted for the proposed Alberta seniors' benefit will go for administrative costs. There are no administrative costs in the \$111 million shown in the estimates. The program will be administered by the staff who administer the existing programs, only it will take fewer of them to do so and accordingly the cost will be less. Seniors want to know about the proposed Alberta seniors' benefit program and will continue to want information when the final version is implemented. We are targeting our information at individual seniors because individual circumstances can vary widely.

The difference between two-senior couples and one-senior couples is a question that is being raised in our information sessions. Under the current programs both spouses receive Alberta assured income plan support if they are 65 or over. Only the senior spouse receives assistance if one partner is under 65. We have simply applied the same rule to the Alberta seniors' benefit, resulting in the difference of \$1,150.

We are looking at health benefits for couples to see if some accommodation can be made for one-senior couples. The amount given for the current extended health benefits program was calculated by dividing the total expenditures under this program by the total number of seniors in Alberta.

The current consultation process with seniors has been very extensive. We have held information sessions and focused workshops throughout the province of Alberta. Personally I have spoken with some several thousand seniors to this point. I will continue to monitor the cumulative impact of changes, and we are prepared to be flexible within the envelope of money available for seniors' programs.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had several questions on a variety of subjects. First, what regulations will be reduced under item 9 of Implications of Change on page 11 of the business plan? The community services division of Alberta Community Development is reviewing the Libraries Act and regulations. A special review committee is looking at the Libraries Act and regulations including public library structures, funding, and governance. It will make its recommendations by the end of August 1995. Provisions or changes to legislation will be made on the basis of both reviews. In the meantime the regulations are being updated.

Historical resources grants regulations are being reviewed with a view to eliminating them. Almost all historical resources preservation and development grants are now under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, a lottery funded Crown agency. Regulations governing palaeontological and archaeological resources are being reviewed with a view to combining them.

The hon. member asked about the expected results and performance measures and how they would be costed, measured, and paid for. She also wanted to know about the meaning of the term "assisted" in this context. We will pay for this work by revising our priorities and reallocating resources. We will measure levels of community leadership with individual community and project report cards. We will also monitor levels of volunteer involvement and look at the number of volunteer development and youth leadership workshops undertaken. Assisted community development projects do not involve funding. When invited, our staff assists communities as consultants and catalysts, helping them find solutions to their own local problems.

The hon. member also wanted to know if community field service offices initiate or respond to community development opportunities. Community development officers activities are

community driven. They respond to community needs as identified by the communities. They refer community leaders, businesses, and organizations to sources of information and technical and financial resources. They give advice and training in leadership development, organizational governance, and volunteer support and development. They help community organizations, individuals, and businesses co-ordinate among themselves, with other communities, and with government departments and agencies.

Once more from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar a question concerning new technology and the relationship of libraries in our province to other provinces and to distance learning programs. Alberta libraries have always been involved in formal and informal resource-sharing programs. The library community itself under the auspices of Libraries: Alberta Strategic Alliance for Planning – that is, Libraries: ASAP – is looking at the needs and options for service delivery, including new technologies. Staff in my department will work with our partners in the Alberta public library community on this issue.

Public libraries play a vital role in lifelong learning. While their mandate does not centre on distance learning, they have always had a supplementary role. My department's programs help local library boards provide public service to the community. As communities change and evolve, boards make decisions which respond to their needs, including lifelong learning.

With respect to the questions from the hon. Member for Little Bow, he asked for clarification concerning the threshold at which benefits start occurring to seniors with specific reference to the base amount of \$10,432. Ten thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars is the base amount most single seniors with no private income receive from the government of Canada. It consists of the maximum old age security, the maximum guaranteed income supplement, and the federal GST credit. It is also the base amount for the existing Alberta assured income plan and for the proposed Alberta seniors' benefit program.

Under the Alberta seniors' benefit single seniors will have a minimum income of \$12,348 if they are homeowners and \$12,898 if they rent private accommodation. The existing Alberta assured income plan and the federal guaranteed income supplement both reduce payments to seniors for each dollar of private income received. The proposed Alberta seniors' benefit program will work in exactly the same way except the reduction rates will on average be lower than before.

Next, several questions came from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. The hon. member along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont wanted clarification on the impact of the Alberta seniors' benefit on widows' pensions. The Alberta widows' pension program will continue, and widows receiving assistance through this program will continue to receive assistance through that program.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert asked what we are doing in the area of English as a Second Language courses for immigrants. The responsibility for immigration and settlement including English as a Second Language is with the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development. I might suggest that the hon. member talk to my colleague the Hon. Jack Ady for information in this area.

The hon. member asked why the Advisory Council on Women's Issues is being allowed to end while the women's policy and program secretariat remains. The government intends to reduce the number of agencies, boards, and commissions. Women's policy and programs will remain to help me make sure that all relevant departments do their part to address women's issues. The staff has the knowledge and expertise to help ensure that

women's perspectives are considered in government policies, programs, and legislation.

Women's policies and programs also delivers the Stepping Stones role model program and provides grants to community groups for educational events, which in part accounts for their additional budget.

Further, on the same subject the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert also wanted to know what the secretariat does. With respect to women's policy and programs they advise and inform other departments and through me cabinet and caucus. They act as a catalyst within government for changes that benefit women. They work on projects with Alberta government departments and with similar government agencies in other jurisdictions. They promote public awareness of women's issues, and finally they support the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues.

8:20

Women's policy and programs will work closely with the women of Alberta and the advisory council to identify ways for women to continue bringing their ideas and concerns to government.

[Mr. Mar's speaking time expired]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, your time's up.

MR. MAR: Well, in final conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I'd now call upon my colleagues Yvonne Fritz and Jocelyn Burgener to speak briefly on the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, no. No.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the Minister of Community Development for providing some answers to many of the questions that were posed by myself and many of our caucus members. It's well appreciated, and I look forward to the balance of them forthcoming very shortly.

I want to begin our part of the debate here, Mr. Chairman, by just sort of visiting a couple of general statements that have been made by the minister and by the government opposite with regard to what it is that Community Development is supposed to be in terms of the business plan which dovetails with the estimates that support that plan.

I note, for example, under the vision and mission of Community Development that among the goals of the department it states that they want, quote, "to improve the social, cultural and recreational conditions of communities," and the sentence goes on. As I look at the estimates and I look at other points of the business plan, I'm sometimes perplexed as to how it is that the minister is going to face up to this challenge when in fact I see rather significant cutbacks being made in all of the areas. Again I say that I and members on this side of the House are not opposed to streamlining or avoiding duplication or effective cost-cutting attempts.

However, having said that, I do have to point out again that there are some serious demisements taking place here which I think are contradictory to the term community development. Specifically I note that we're going to see over the next while the cancellation of the urban parks operating grants – and I'll speak about that again shortly – we're going to see the cancellation of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, and I think we're going to likely see some significant reductions to the

municipal recreation/tourism area as well, and on and on. Having read that, then, I wonder how it is that we're in fact going to see the improvement of social, cultural, and recreational conditions in Alberta. It on the surface at least certainly escapes me.

I see also one other comment that I wanted to just highlight here. It says that "the vision of Community Development is to build a strong province with a high quality of life for all Albertans," and the statement goes on. They sound like nice, flowery words, but again I need to visit that set of flowery words and say: where's the substance to prove that in fact there's going to be this high quality of life in Alberta insofar as the Minister of Community Development's department is concerned? I was looking for some sort of initiative, Mr. Minister, that would sort of substantiate that statement. I thought that somewhere in these new initiatives we would see perhaps the creation of some programs to replace that which is being lost, for example in the area of libraries. Instead what I'm seeing here is the curtailment of some programs.

Again I state that I appreciate the need for paring and the need for effective cost cutting, but as I look at this and I see the rather total disappearance of much of the funding that would traditionally go to buoy these particular areas in Community Development, I'm wondering: after you cut the budget by this much, what's going to be left in Community Development? So I share that challenge with the minister, again knowing that his heart's in the right place with this and wishing him well to try and deliver on the promises being made here. I'm sure he will be giving it his earnest effort.

As I look at that, then, I also have to ask myself seriously not only what is going to be left here by way of Community Development, but specifically what's going to be left to attract more people into our province, into our communities both in the urban centres as well as in rural Alberta that will make Alberta an attractive and a wanted, a desirable place to live. We know that as groups look to other places to locate, they don't just look at the business or economic climate; they also look at the cultural climate. It's rated extremely high when people are evaluating their options of where they want to live, where they want to move to, and so on. I know that the Japanese community, which is well known to us along with other Pacific Rim countries, look at the cultural well-being of an area, because it's there that they create their markets. It's there that they look to see how fresher markets can be attracted to increase their particular spot on the scale of economics.

As we look at Community Development and some of these dramatic changes that are going to be made, I caution us to consider what I would call the spirit and the soul of the community. To me, Mr. Chairman, that's clearly the cultural side of it. We can't begin to appreciate how significant the arts and the humanities, which include all the things from symphonies and libraries, our university programs, recreation, and leisure, are to the well-being of our society. So I hope that somewhere the minister will not lose sight of that. I'm sure he hasn't, but I would just flag it for his attention.

The other comment I just want to make quickly in opening my remarks here is with regards to one of the objectives spelled out in the Community Development plan that says, quote: "To increase the level of leadership, self-sufficiency and local problem solving in Alberta communities." I recognize that there's a tremendous need to do that, because if there is an area where we see countless volunteers on a regular basis, not in an emergency or a parachute basis such as sometimes is necessary in other portfolios – here we see programs always, always supported by a tremendous volunteer network. Hence I applaud the comment of leadership and self-sufficiency, but again I'm looking in the

business plan and I'm reviewing what bits of the budget point in this direction to try and see how it is that this increase is going to take place. Are there going to be some training programs? Is that what the minister has in mind? Are there going to be some workshops that he's going to be expounding on and getting his staff working on, or how is this supposed to take place? [interjection] Pardon me? It's a little bit noisy there, I agree, but I'm sure most members are trying to listen. I appreciate that. Thank you. I shall continue.

It's a commendable objective as I said. I guess we're just looking for a little bit of proof. I'm getting phone calls that would ask me to ask the minister how it is that some of these well-touted aspects of the business plan are going to be accomplished. Certainly some of them I would like to think can and will be accomplished with volunteers, but there's probably the need for some dollars to be attached to that, and that's what the debate is all about.

I think my final comment in the opening section here is with regard to the structure that we might likely see heading toward 1996-97 where it says: "The programs and services of the Department have been assessed against the objectives." But again I just don't see a level of comfort in the benchmarks or the performance measurement outcomes that would allow me to buy into this new plan so heartily as I might otherwise do. Again I see the cultural facilities and historical services division focusing on some economic contribution to the facilities it has.

8:30

I think I flagged it earlier, but I want to just repeat it if I could, Mr. Chairman, that if there are going to be new entrance fees or admission fees levied at interpretive centres in Fort McMurray and elsewhere, if there are going to be increases in admission fees and gate fees at places like the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, which the minister referred to earlier, my question is: will there be some possible consideration if not provision for those new dollars that are coming about as a result of the increases you're placing here, Mr. Minister, to flow back into those same areas that are attracting those dollars? For example, the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, which is a well-run and an excellent attestation to our pioneer history here east of Edmonton, is going to see nearly a doubling in entrance gate fees for families and for children. I think that's a significant amount of money given the traffic that flows through there. It would be a wonderful gesture, Mr. Minister, if you could say: "Look, you've worked hard to attract more visitors to this area, to this cultural facility. Some of that money therefore is due back to you." It might even work as an incentive, I would say. So in your deliberations please keep that in mind, and in any event provide me a brief answer at some point when it's possible.

Now, I want to move on here and talk a little bit about some of the other areas that are of great concern to me insofar as Community Development is concerned. I'm going to start with a couple of comments about libraries. I know that the minister has said that funding overall will remain largely the same, but I guess, as I say, that they are looking to fund the three library systems and some of the expansion that is included there. I just wonder whether or not there is any provision being contemplated for some of the losses of programs that will result. For example, we know that the talking book program and the multilingual biblioservices are discontinued, and I think these were programs that served Albertans well. Quite frankly, although they weren't necessarily the highest used areas, perhaps they were important to those groups, such as the blind, who did use the talking book program extensively. So I am a little bit concerned about what it is that

the minister might be able to do to reassure that those programs don't get lost totally. Perhaps they're just on the back burner and have been temporarily discontinued. Maybe he would care to comment on that.

I want to comment briefly also on the area of cultural industries, which I know we've debated a little bit in the past, but it's relevant today because I had a phone call on it, Mr. Minister, so I hope you'll entertain this as a question. The simple question with regard to this area is: when will those dollars be made available to your department from economic development so we can get on with some of the many programs and the many projects that are waiting for answers? If in fact that has happened, then a simple answer would do. But, seriously, we do have a lot of film producers and recording artists out there who are waiting for answers, and some of them have been waiting I think since last June or July. The program, as you know, is about two years old, and there are some legitimate concerns there. So thank you for entertaining that question today.

The other area that has my concern here tonight is the area of urban parks. The operating grant for these urban parks, as we read in estimates, actually has now been phased out. My worry here quite frankly is that we have developed quite an infrastructure around urban parks. When the urban parks program was first introduced to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, I believe it was for the development of significant open spaces and parkland areas within the corporate boundaries of our cities. In fact, in 1989 I think the province announced the addition of the other 14 cities to augment the two major cities. Each city park was provided something in the neighbourhood of \$300 per capita. The development of the urban park master plan, I think, was a precursor to accessing these funds allocated. There were special criteria set up to access the grants. They could only be utilized to develop or conserve and protect significant natural areas and prepare them for resident use. So the urban parks program was introduced to help these municipalities and to give them the ability to protect these large tracts of natural areas for future generations.

Now, having done that and having put in motion all of these different parks programs, I'm frankly a bit concerned as to how it is now that the government would see these programs being operated when we've seen all of these things rolled into an unconditional grants program where the municipalities may choose to fund the parks program in part or may not. I mean, there's going to be a real scramble and a real fight for those dollars.

I want to just back this up with a concern that was expressed by Alderman Bev Longstaff in an article back on March 8 of this year in the *Calgary Herald*, where Alderman Longstaff said that most of the plan for urban parks is now, quote,

history because the province broke a promise to the city. "We did all of this work with the promise that the funding would come through from the province. We were counting on it."

So clearly when you cut this kind of a program or you put something onto the backs of other levels of government by way of downloading, there is a sense that a promise made earlier had been broken, and I wonder if the minister would specifically address that particular cut that's been made in Calgary and how he thinks he can perhaps help them recover from it.

Now, the direction that all the municipalities chose in relation to urban parks was to develop some interconnecting pathways that I believe would provide pedestrian access to the areas developed as parks of one sort or another. There was indeed a very high priority placed on either preserving or conserving these natural areas, and the evolution of the program has seen increased flexibility on the part of the province in some cases, which I think was welcomed in some areas. For example, St. Albert I think

used some of its urban park funds in advance of plan approval and assigned some of their funds to the development of an athletic venue, and there are probably other examples. As I look at how the programs are being developed and delivered, I know that a great deal of effort is being put into working with groups like the Kinsmen, the Lions, the Rotary, and so on and that the integration of this program into an unconditional municipal grant really does spell the end of the priority that was once placed on open space development, Mr. Chairman. So I'd look forward to some comment from the minister as to how he now sees these urban parks having to suddenly scramble for maintenance.

The final comment is with regard to municipal recreation/tourism areas, the MRTA, which is really the rural counterpart of the cities' urban parks program. I think there are something like 200 of these in existence at the moment throughout the province, and approximately 70 percent of these are located in central Alberta. Yet there continues to be a difference in the funding allocation between constituencies, and I hope that they're not based on politics. I'll have the minister provide us, if he wouldn't mind, with some sort of a breakdown of where these funds are going, in what amounts, and I'll welcome his response to that.

8:40

So as I conclude with the MRTA program, Mr. Chairman, I know that this program was responsible for developing many outstanding facilities throughout the province. However, it's facing much the same challenges as many of the other programs in the minister's department, and with the continuing reduction or outright elimination of these programs, any guarantee of maintaining these facilities as a legacy is at significant risk. I'm hopeful the minister recognizes that and will comment if there's something to the contrary. What makes this program even more vulnerable than others is the total reliance on provincial support for operating funds. There was really very little effort, I think, or training programs developed to assist these groups in becoming self-sufficient, yet suddenly it seems they're having to scramble and do so.

Mr. Chairman, I'll just conclude by saying that I have spoken about most of the other areas of the budget in previous debates. I would welcome the opportunity to speak to other points here, but I'll look forward to the minister's answers to those, and I thank you for listening.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Tonight as chairman of the Multiculturalism Commission I'd like to discuss a bit the programs, the activities of the commission and how they relate to the diversity of the province. These programs promote an environment that values diversity in an effort to strengthen our province by taking advantage of our diverse skills and talents. As was mentioned by the member across the way, diversity is a fact in Alberta. It is good for the province. Our cultural and linguistic diversity provide Alberta with an advantage in the global marketplace by attracting business and enhancing our ability to do business abroad.

Alberta's cultural diversity is an asset that enables us to host major international events such as the Calgary Winter Olympics, the Commonwealth Games, the University Games, the upcoming world wheelchair basketball games, and the world skating championships. The success of these events provides a spotlight

on Alberta that enhances our profile around the world. It creates opportunities for increased trade and commerce.

To compete internationally and preserve our quality of life at home, I believe it is imperative that government, business, institutions, and communities listen to and consult with each other about the Alberta advantage, which we've discussed before in this Legislature, and that advantage includes being a culturally diverse society. I believe that Albertans want an inclusive society that respects differences but does not give special privileges to people of different backgrounds and cultures. Awareness of the global competitive environment requires an appreciation of other cultures and political systems. Mr. Chairman, a strong culturally diverse province can serve as a model for social and economic development.

The Alberta Multiculturalism Commission encourages Albertans to enrich their lives by experiencing this society. Commission programs assist organizations, institutions, and businesses to develop and implement activities to incorporate diversity in their operations. The commission strives to educate Albertans about the value of our diverse society and the benefits that we all derive through harmonious co-existence with one another.

Mr. Chairman, on March 17 I had discussed in my comments that the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission had completed a public review of its three-year multiculturalism action plan. Tonight as chairman of the commission I want to share with the members of the House some of the detailed input that we received and the issues that we were told were of concern to Albertans.

Albertans across the province said that we generally did a pretty good job over the past three years. They told us that the plan had gone a long way in helping Albertans to understand, accept, and value the diversity that I'd mentioned earlier, that we'd indeed helped public and private organizations to better manage their diverse human resources and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population, and that our programs helped some Albertans to become full participants in and contributors to our society.

They also told us that we were not at a point of time where each and every Albertan can feel secure in pursuing his or her hopes and dreams. They told us that there was still work to be done and issues to resolve. Everywhere we went in this province, Albertans told us they feared that the incidence of racism and discrimination continues to grow. Surveys conducted over the past year across Canada and in Alberta confirmed that Canadians and Albertans are becoming more openly intolerant. More recently we've seen signs of open hostility and intolerance toward new immigrants across the country.

Despite the positiveness of the commission's message over the past three years, Mr. Chairman, many participants in the review suggested that the message was not reaching all Albertans and in fact clearly wanted that message to reach the members of the Legislature. There is a continued belief by many that our programs focus strictly on funding ethnocultural communities to retain their traditions rather than on helping them to become participants and contributors to Alberta society. Across Alberta we were told that government of all levels must show consistently through both words and actions that Alberta's diversity makes this province a better place to live. Participants told us that this kind of visible leadership is needed if we are to see diversity as a strength for Alberta and not a weakness.

In the implementation of the commission's current action plan we focused on developing partnerships with many public- and private-sector organizations. Communities were asked to take greater responsibility for diversity programming. We were told by participants that this approach was effective and needed to be continued. We were also told we should continue to focus on

providing ongoing support and resources to communities and organizations to help them acquire the necessary skills to become even more responsible for looking after their own needs.

These by no means are the only issues that people raised with us, but they are the ones that were most consistently mentioned. In the development of the commission's strategic plan we are looking at ways to meet these issues head on. The commission has shared its preliminary thoughts on new directions with participants and is now assessing their feedback. A new plan for the commission will be tabled in the House in due course.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to direct a number of comments and queries to the Minister of Community Development. I had the opportunity to speak to estimates for this department on March 10. When I ran out of time, I'd just been addressing the question of the public library system, the regional library system in the province. One of the things I wanted to raise – I didn't have the chance then, and I'm delighted to have the chance now – is that when the all-party panel on freedom of information received presentations from the provincial library association, they told me something I had never thought very much about and was frankly quite surprised to hear. That was that although a great number of Albertans go to their local library to access information about government, the librarians are frustrated because in too many cases the libraries themselves don't have access to or don't have copies of a whole host of government publications and materials and brochures.

We're not talking about secret information. This isn't something that you would need a freedom of information law to access. It's available if you happen to live in Edmonton and you happen to be close to a government office. But to Albertans in Taber, Alberta, or Peace River or some place that's some distance from Edmonton or Calgary, particularly some distance from Edmonton, this is a major concern. What the people in the libraries pointed out to those of us on the panel that had the privilege of hearing them was that we probably have little idea of how many Albertans see their local library and the regional library system in this province as, number one, their first resource in terms of trying to get information about government. I expect all members have a selfish interest in this, because I expect the number two choice, when people can't get this information, is to go their local MLA constituency office.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know if there's some compelling reason, whether it's a function of cost or some other reason, but it just seems to me to be a positive kind of thing that this minister and this government could work with the regional library system, which I think is absolutely first class, to find a way of making sure that virtually all government material that's publicly available can be accessed by Albertans, particularly in the more remote corners of the province, through their regional library system. Now, all I can tell you is that the librarians expressed frustration, so it's clear, Mr. Minister, that it's not happening now. I'd request simply that you look into that and see if there's some way we can even better use the library system that we have now and that it is effective.

8:50

The other perspective I've got is that in the Calgary-Buffalo constituency the Connaught community school has an extremely active community school group, and representatives of 30 or 40 agencies in downtown Calgary meet on a monthly basis. The

Calgary public library plays a very big part in those monthly meetings of the Connaught community school. The purpose of the meetings, of course, is to attempt to find better ways of delivering service to that large number of people living in the inner city in the Connaught community, but it goes beyond that. I appreciate again from that perspective how important the public libraries are, particularly to low-income Albertans and people that otherwise have difficulty getting information. So I'd be interested in the minister's comments on that.

I want to ask the minister whether it's part of his mandate to liaise with Mr. Rock, the federal Minister of Justice, with respect to reintroduction of the court challenges program. Now, it may be that that's a function of the Justice department in this province, but since the court challenges program has uniquely been at least Charter based, I'm interested in finding out what the position is of the government of the province of Alberta relative to that. If that's not within the minister's mandate, then I'll follow it up with the Justice minister.

The other matter I wanted to raise with the hon. minister, Mr. Chairman, has to do with attitudes and questions of tolerance. There was a survey done, and it was entitled A Survey of Attitudes toward Human Rights and toward Self in Alberta Schools. This in fact was a study that was coauthored by the Alberta Human Rights Commission, by the Department of Community Development, and by the Department of Education. What it was was a survey of some 5,434 students in 111 schools throughout the province, and there were a number of objectives in the study. It was grade 8 and grade 11 students whose opinions were solicited. There were five objectives, and one of the objectives was, and I quote, "to determine the extent to which Grade 8 and Grade 11 students hold positive attitudes about human rights and about themselves." One of the other objectives was "to establish provincial benchmarks for future use by schools, school boards and Alberta Education." The survey was done in 1991. I think the results were published in late 1992. I've got the summary report here, but the minister will also have access to the data in published form.

There were some real concerns coming out of that. What was identified, particularly with grade 11 students – and I can quote a couple of the findings that were of concern. Grade 11 students, particularly males in small communities, those with populations less than 6,000, expressed a lower level of tolerance for new Canadians. Males at both grade levels, but particularly grade 11 males in small communities, were less willing to accept the equality of the sexes regarding job assignments. There was a particular concern with respect to grade 11 males in terms of tolerance, once again in terms of religion. This is important material, because I think that . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: It's four years out of date, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, the point is that studies tend to be never as current as we would like them, but one of the key recommendations from the task force that undertook this survey was to replicate the study, to do it again three years later, in 1994, and the point was to determine to what extent there had been change, if any.

Now, I guess I'd like to ask the minister, Mr. Chairman, whether in fact that recommendation from this task force is going to be followed up, whether that further survey is going to be done, and I think also to indicate to the minister how important it is that we follow this up. There's always much talk, and certainly the task force looking at revision of the Individual's Rights Protection Act has heard a number of submissions. But I think

the submission that is always heard is that if you're going to address human rights, the most effective way to do it is not a police kind of action after the fact on a case-by-case basis but by addressing attitudes of intolerance, particularly among children. So we have an opportunity here, and I'm anxious to see that the excellent work done by the two departments and the Human Rights Commission be pursued. If the minister hasn't made a decision on this, perhaps he will take this as my strongest urging that in fact there be that kind of follow-up.

The other suggestion I want to make comes from a function that I attended at the human rights office in Calgary, in talking with one of the investigating officers. We talked at some length about the challenge of allowing people in small centres, particularly in rural Alberta, to understand better the work of the Alberta Human Rights Commission. I know there are cost considerations, but one of the things that struck me, Mr. Chairman, is that in every centre in Alberta, at least during the summer months, there are fairs and exhibitions. It occurred to me that it wouldn't represent a huge cost to the provincial government if you were to arrange to have somebody from the Alberta Human Rights Commission attempt to at least have some profile or some appearance in smaller centres in this province, even if it's only once a year. It would be better, of course, to be done more often. It's the sort of thing you could advertise in advance. You could have an officer of the Human Rights Commission be available to receive queries by citizens, to speak to local media, local opinion leaders, to talk about what the valuable work is of the commission. Now, I don't know whether that's being done in some parts of the province. I think there's merit in it.

It occurs to me that if we want to save costs, there are other services provided by the government, if they're not privatized in the meantime, such as employment standards and other kinds of protective services. What we could in fact do, Mr. Chairman, would be to have representatives of a couple of these agencies, these government providers of protective services, go into small communities simply – to use the credo of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs: one stop shopping – to allow Albertans in even the most remote parts of the province to find out what the Human Rights Commission is all about, and these other agencies too, and how it can be of service to them, how it can be effective to them. So I'd like the minister to consider that. I guess what I'm asking him is: what kind of outreach is done through his office or through the Alberta Human Rights Commission?

It seems to me that as we look at shrinking dollars, there's an unfortunate tendency to start centralizing the service, in trying to bring all of your investigators together. We're saying that perhaps some of the offices, like the Ombudsman's office or whatever, to consolidate are going to go from two offices to one office. If that sort of thing happens with the Human Rights Commission, then that means reduced visibility. Reduced visibility means fewer Albertans able to take advantage of the important work that can be done by the commission.

Those are my questions and suggestion, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

9:00

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to bring some information forward on behalf of the Seniors Advisory Council. [some applause] It's my time, guys. You're going to use it up. Thank you.

I would like to just put some information in front of you. I've had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the advisory council a few times in estimates, and I think it's important to focus a little bit on the work the council does. I know the hon. minister has spoken about some of the issues of the Alberta seniors benefit program, and I'm pleased to say that the council has been very active in attending meetings and making commentary. We will be reviewing some of the recommendations as early as later next week.

There are some recommendations that are in our health care reform and also issues that have come forward on the Alberta seniors benefit that have been a focus of council's work over the last few years. I'd like to highlight a few of those. One, of course, is the single point of entry on behalf of seniors. The confusion of accessing our health care system continues to distress them, and the kind of putting together of a unified way of accessing the health care system with shared information is something that we have advocated for a number of years. In addition, we are looking at the introduction of the smart card, which is in the health care business plan. This is something that seniors see as a real opportunity to work against the serious issue of overmedication of seniors and also that complexity of having to continue to give information when they need to access the health care system. They're very pleased to see that that's coming forward.

We have also advocated changes in the Individual's Rights Protection Act under the Alberta human rights legislation to protect people against discrimination based on age. You know, as we talk about restructuring in the Alberta seniors benefit, one of the continually strong arguments that was raised was that because of the fact that we have mandatory retirement at age 65, some seniors have an inability to continue working and therefore continue earning income. In addition to that, of course, there are those in our community who do discriminate on the basis of age when it comes to employment opportunities.

I would also like to talk briefly about some of the programs that we have been involved with. We have a council that was put together for the primary purpose of not only advising the minister but gathering information on issues of concern. Also, we worked very closely with the health care system on looking at concerns for seniors as they accessed that, and one of those is the issue of long-term care. Seniors have a very serious concern about moving through the aging process and having to finally leave their homes and perhaps go into apartments or complexes, which are very functional and serviceable for them when they're up and mobile and healthy. But then moving into the long-term care process, because these have always been on the medical model and much more institutionalized, seniors are quite concerned that they have to perhaps forsake some of their dignity and some of the quality of life because they need to access this type of care facility. So we are working on the ventures program to bring some new models of long-term care and have them more community based and a little more reflecting how seniors actually live and not institutionalize that process in their life at this time.

Everybody talks about taking the 5 percent, and everybody talks about the need to contribute to the deficit. Because this is estimates, I thought it would be important to share with you some of the physical dollars that the advisory council accesses and how they've been expended. Just for your reference in this Assembly, I think it would be interesting to note that while the Seniors Advisory Council shares its budget in concert with the women's and seniors' policy and programs because of the very strong and direct relationship we have with the department and the resources we draw from them, we have taken a reduction of close to 50

percent in our budget, from \$550,000 down to \$228,250 this year. That's quite a generous contribution on behalf of the council and a willingness to do more with less quite clearly.

A large portion of the funding that we receive has to do with grant money. This is money that the council distributes back to the community. Of course, one of our mandates when it was developed was to support awareness of aging and seniors within the community. A significant number of dollars is actually in grant to the Alberta Council on Aging, which, as you know, networks within the whole province and assists in collecting information.

We also fund, on request, attendance at the Canadian Association on Gerontology annual convention. Since I've taken the chairmanship, we have sent letters of awareness to the people who've received these grants through their various seniors communities. We find that the opportunity for Albertans to represent seniors at this convention have been very beneficial in bringing the concerns of seniors to the national agenda.

We also fund an Alzheimer's program, usually held in the southeast of the province. This is on Alzheimer's awareness, as it's a growing health concern and a very, very distressing aging process for our seniors and for their families. We're finding that that workshop is becoming more and more well attended. Because of the information component of it, I believe that the advisory council through this grant is assisting that local health community by bringing more people awareness of the Alzheimer's illness and how they can network better within their community when they come back home and deal with their parents or with their loved ones who have now contracted this illness.

We also provide an information workers workshop. That is a commitment to try and put together from the various health agencies and seniors' communities some very specific information. Once again, by putting it all together in one workshop, we then can assist caregivers who work in the various FCSS programs, community services, long-term care to come in and find out what's going on in terms of changes to seniors and seniors' programs and health-related issues. We've been very fortunate in funding that particular workshop.

We also have had a program called: energize, don't tranquilize. Again, the rising cost of health care is not just bricks and mortar. It has to do with the large consumption of medication by seniors, which not only drives up the cost of health because these drugs have to be paid for, but it is also one of the contributing factors in seniors having to access health care systems because of overmedication. We will be looking at putting on another one of these workshops.

We also work very hard in terms of developing policy initiatives, things like grandparents' rights, which one of the members spoke on earlier this afternoon, community supports program, initiatives on advanced directives. There are a number of policy issues which the seniors, through the advisory council, work on in terms of a policy paper and circulate through the community and bring to the minister.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's been an interesting last few months dealing with the consultation process. I would also like to say on behalf of seniors that one of the significant things that's come out of this consultation process is their ability to focus on both national and provincial issues that affect them which extend beyond whether or not they get certain benefits under the Alberta seniors benefit program. They have a concern about the cumulative impact as our government does achieve its deficit reduction program. They are concerned about the relationship we have with the federal government and have asked us to make sure that the various ministers who work at the interprovincial level continue

to make sure that their concerns are heard. Seniors are extremely concerned about the relationship they have in the community, with the perception that they are all wealthy and, in addition, that they are now a market and a commodity. As recently as last Sunday night, the *Venture* TV program on CBC focused on them as a target group, given that under the perception of the media they control a fair amount of the wealth. They have a concern about what image they have in the public if that is all that people hear about them.

9:10

So we will continue through discussion and, I'm sure, through the report on the consultation process as an advisory council to take some of those issues that really do require focus, some policy initiatives, perhaps, and even legislation down the road, and bring those to the minister and to my colleagues in the Assembly. It is a privilege to chair this organization, and I thank the minister for the support he has given us as we deal with this very difficult time of restructuring. Yet with a very strong voice they want to be at the table and make decisions that they can live with and that they can contribute to for a better Alberta.

I thank you for the opportunity this evening to bring that to your attention.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks for another opportunity to continue some questions. May I first of all express my gratitude to the minister for his answers to some of the issues that we raised when we last looked at the estimates for Community Development. I'm glad, minister, to have had your comments about the field work. A little disappointed perhaps, I had hoped that the department, particularly in times of recession when perhaps there's a greater inclination for people to be marginalized, that your field-workers would be into the business of mobilizing people to take control of their lives for self-determination. I think perhaps in the past there had been some energizing work from the department, and hopefully the department will see its way into continuing that and perhaps even putting more energy into it in the future, because I see that as being an increasing need in our province.

Mr. Chairman, I also thank the minister once again for maintaining the library services. This becomes ever more significant as the recession continues. As we see more unemployment in the province, I think there is an increasing demand in our library service for technological information, and it needs to be there and available throughout the province. I'm pleased with the kind of progress that has been made there.

Mr. Chairman, just an aside. We had some concern expressed to the Minister of Education regarding disposal of books that were redundant or extra to our needs. I wonder if the minister could tell us if there's been some collaboration between those two departments, not necessarily for Alberta library purposes but for purposes of libraries in Third World countries and elsewhere, perhaps on the continent or even in some remote communities of Canada. I think people were concerned that some of the organizations that would ordinarily have picked up extra books did not in this case. I think we need to perhaps pursue that a bit more aggressively. I would look to this department to do that with the Department of Education.

Mr. Chairman, the women's advisory council once again. I'm pleading with the minister to reconsider. I hope the work of the council has by now sold itself to this minister: the kind of work

that they have done in years past, the kinds of needs that women in this province have and have expressed through the council. I think it's very important that there is a balanced, unencumbered, arm's-length operation that works for women in the public interest and supported by the public of this province. I draw again to the minister's attention the very excellent recommendations they have made in the past that I think have been helpful not only to government programs but to many private nonprofit groups and institutions in our community. I think they have done outstanding work, and I would hope that the minister and his department will reconsider that continuation.

When I see in the planning book that it's to be phased out or consolidated, I'm not sure what consolidated would mean. I don't see the women's advisory council being a natural to be consolidated with any other program. I think it's a stand-alone one. So I would ask that he give some real thought to giving that council some indication, some clues that its life will be continued beyond the termination date or the phase-in or the consolidation date that has been mentioned in the game plan.

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to the report on the Human Rights Commission. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has mentioned that. I believe the commission again has served very well in this province, and it also serves as a weather vane to us in government to indicate needs that perhaps are not as visible to us as they should be as we see their report and learn that some of the things that we don't like to believe are happening are still occurring in our province and need our attention.

Let me turn my comments, Mr. Chairman, to the seniors' secretariat and the Alberta seniors' benefit program and the other programs that seniors are very interested in and concerned about. I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie, responsible for the seniors' secretariat, for her remarks and for clarifying a number of things about how that secretariat is working. I'm pleased to note that the chairman and the minister have attended many of the meetings and seminars that have been organized by seniors, and I gather that at some of them the minister got an earful, which perhaps he hadn't anticipated. I know that seniors are noted for their candour, and I'm sure he accepted it in the sincere fashion in which it was meant.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

I know the chairman of the seniors' advisory council is as concerned as I am about the seniors that we don't see: the seniors who are isolated, the seniors who are hidden away, the seniors who don't show up at the rallies or at the meetings and the seniors' organizations, the seniors who are frail, the seniors who are very vulnerable, the seniors who sometimes are subjected to abuse and isolation, the seniors who are extremely vulnerable to all kinds of adverse activities and concerns that they express to me, loneliness not being the least. Mr. Chairman, I know that when we talk about the Alberta seniors benefit, the minister and the chairman have met with a great many seniors, and I'm grateful for that. But I think we have to be very careful to reach out to those that don't get the information, and I'm sure that's part of what you are working at as well. I'd be happy to work and I try my best to make sure that the seniors in my constituency have all the information they need.

Mr. Chairman, no doubt the process was not one that I think has been the best one, and perhaps that can be acknowledged at this point in time. It has certainly increased fear and anxiety. There's angst in our seniors' communities that I would have hoped we could have prevented. Seniors are on the one hand very energetic and capable. On the other hand, they're subject to many

fears. They're worried. Like the toast and the jam they want their income and their assets and their life to come out even. They're concerned about being a burden to their family and to society. I know it's not easy to allay that fear, but I think we must really try our best to do so and not by the kinds of things that we do, which seem logical to us sitting here. We must try not to increase that anxiety that seniors and their families have. I have to say that I think the process has not been helpful in that regard, and I hope that we can begin to repair some of those anxieties.

9:20

Mr. Chairman, the five programs that have been rolled into the Alberta seniors benefit. I wonder if the minister can give us some data about how much money it is anticipated will be saved by doing this. What kinds of funds are we hoping can be returned to the province or unexpended by rolling these five? I mean, clearly this isn't being combined just in order to create one window. While I think that has merit, there will be a savings as a result of that. What is that saving? What have these programs been costing? What have they cost Alberta taxpayers before, and what are we anticipating to save? I know that the minister has been giving consideration, because he has told us that, to that threshold level that has been determined, and hopefully there's some flexibility there. I personally would be happy to see the whole thing scrapped and go back to square one. I'm not sure if that's in the minister's mind. Perhaps we'll know more after the report of the consultation has come to the House.

I think we need to know, we need to have a clearer idea about this envelope; \$111 million in it this year, \$148 million next year. What's that based on? Can you help me, Mr. Minister, to understand why it's gone from \$111 million to \$148 million? Is it because there will be more seniors? Is it because you anticipate more seniors will be poor? Those are the kinds of questions that people have asked me. How do I know whether these people are on the right track? That's one line in our estimates, and it's a pretty thin line at that too. I think we deserve, not just for seniors but for all taxpayers, to be able to give them a breakdown of that. What were the costs before? What kinds of savings will accrue as a result of this?

Now, I've also understood from the chairman, in answer to questions, that the envelope will not be increased. If that is in fact the case, if we are going to operate those five programs within that envelope and if we're going to operate them at a fixed finite number of \$111 million and if we are also going to increase the threshold, what's going to give? That's a major problem. Seniors in groups all over this city and the province have asked me that. This is like a balloon, you know. There's only a limited amount in there. If you squeeze it on one side, then what is going to be taken on the other? They really want to know. The minister has explained and I think we all understood how the thresholds were arrived at in the first place. I think again that you've been told without equivocation in many parts of the province that they're not appropriate, that they don't make a lot of sense. There are seniors – and I've said this before – who say to me, "Well, shall we get divorced?" I had a letter last week from a senior – and probably the same people write to you, Mr. Minister – saying: "My wife works. I'm on a fixed income. My wife has a small part-time job. She makes \$500 a month. Now, if she gives up that \$500 a month, we can qualify. So should she give up her work? Give me some advice." Those are the kinds of questions that keep coming. What sort of flexibility?

That leads me to the next question. People want to know how this is going to work. Well, it's going to work on presumably your last year's income tax or some other form that you fill out.

Where do I do that? Do I do that in my own town? How do I get that form? When am I going to get that? Because it says here the 1st of July, and I need to know right now. I'm sending in my income tax, and I want to know. I want to know right now how I'm going to qualify for these programs. They're very anxious about it.

Seniors have expressed to me that they don't believe the government understands the cumulative effect. While I have said that the ASB, combining five programs into one-window shopping with hopefully a rethinking of some of them and of the thresholds, may have some benefits to it, there are many other things that are influencing seniors. These I think are the ones, and the cumulative effect of the other programs, some of which are this government's programs and others that are not within this government's control, that are affecting seniors' lives. Mr. Chairman, they are such things as the drug payments. Now, I know the intent, that this will benefit seniors who are on very high-cost drugs, but I have seniors coming to my constituency office – and I'm sure many members do – who say, "I'm on X number of drugs, and I'm going to have to pay considerably more, and I'm very concerned about that because I'm going to have to reduce them."

The cumulative effect of the cost of living. The GST for seniors who are above a certain threshold. Everything they do costs them a great deal more. The cumulative effect of property taxes. We're encouraging them to stay in their own homes. With changes in assessment, property taxes for many seniors, particularly those living in inner-city neighbourhoods, have gone out of sight. We want them to stay in their homes, but we're changing our threshold for the property tax reduction program. So they're immediately threatened by that. The cost of their utilities has gone up considerably. We want them to have places to live that are comfortable. We want them to have telephones. We want them to have medic alerts and all of those things that make it possible for them to be independent in their homes, yet we seem to be creating a program, Mr. Minister, that is working against that.

Now, if seniors have been able to accumulate some modest savings in their lives, their interest income has now gone down. So they're getting squeezed at that end, and we're squeezing them further from our Alberta seniors benefit.

Mr. Chairman, I talked today with seniors who are in the seniors' lodge program who are deeply worried about the increase in rents and the notion of lodge rents and subsidized housing rents being deregulated. They look at that and they say: "Well, my income is such and such, and I don't think I fit quite within that threshold. I'm not going to be able to afford it. Where will I go to live? Where can I possibly live?" Seniors say to me: "I've been dependent for some years now on someone helping me with homemaking and housekeeping and home care. I am now going to have to pay more for home care. This will add to my cost, and I may not be able to maintain myself at home any longer."

Mr. Minister, it's these increasing other programs, a number of which are not within the purview of this government, that certainly must be taken into consideration in collaboration with either other governments or institutions before we come to any final conclusion on it. I hope that you can reassure me and other members and seniors throughout the province that this will be part of your consideration as you study the kinds of things that seniors have told you.

9:30

Mr. Chairman, I believe that some of the things that we're doing for seniors are in fact counterproductive. I think we're on a slippery slope. We may be at the stage where we're going to

drive people into a dependent life-style where we had helped and hoped for many years to keep them independent.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that the minister has certainly now learned that seniors across this province are not in general well off. I think he's heard enough of that: that they are contributors, that they are consumers, that they do want to be part of the decision-making, that they don't want to be asked after the fact and after the decision has been made. I hope he can assure us in this House that this kind of thing will never happen again. I would like his comments on whether or not there's a possibility that the program can be scrapped and that we can start again, which I think would be infinitely the best way to do it. I think they would give us some really great help in developing a program that has the flexibility that we need in 1994 and onward for seniors in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to begin by congratulating the minister on the balance that he has achieved in his budget. This was a very tough budget, and he has shown fairness and good judgment in the way that the funds have been allocated for things such as the fine arts, museums, archives, and the auditoriums. Many of these activities, which I'm sure the minister has realized, have a very definite economic spin-off for tourism dollars for our province, so I'm very pleased to see that he has done his best to maintain the funding there.

I would also like to congratulate some of the people who are involved with these fine institutions, such as the ones at the Glenbow. They have accepted the challenge of less dollars and have been very innovative in the ways that they have adjusted to meet the new reality. One of the new initiatives that the Glenbow is beginning will provide a space to hold a theme wedding; you just name the era, and they'll provide the rest. You have to give credit to this spirit of free enterprise and self-determination in many of the groups who are working in this field.

I have a question on the urban parks program, 2.2.1, the operating grants. What expenses does this cover, Mr. Minister, and when does the operating grant finish? I wondered if the operating grants are tied to the capital funding that comes out of the heritage savings trust fund. I know the city of Calgary was quite disappointed as they had done two years of extensive public consultations to develop a very comprehensive plan which had just been completed when the termination of the program was announced. They realize that getting the deficit under control is a priority to ensure the very future of our province. My question is: will there be plans to revive this program, perhaps, in future years when the fiscal restraints are less onerous? When we're doing the review of the heritage savings trust fund, if there is indicated support for the continuation of the urban parks program, perhaps it could be spread out over more years, less amounts, doing it in installments, that type of thing. There may be some ways that we could look at it in the future and phase in the individual projects.

I'd like to ask about the revenue generation through admission charges at the museums such as the Royal Tyrrell and the Head-Smashed-In. How are these going? Have they been well accepted by the public? Are they making a significant contribution to the operating costs and gaining more self-sufficiency for these organizations?

I'd like to also ask under 2.1.5, which I understand involves the transfer of the Percy Page Centre to the Alberta sport, recreation, parks, and wildlife foundation, what will be the impact of this transfer. Will the Alberta sport, recreation, parks, and wildlife

foundation receive additional funding from the lottery funds to compensate for assuming responsibility for the Percy Page Centre?

With that, I'll close. I know the time is wearing on. I'd like to again congratulate the minister and his department. You've had quite a job to do, I know, in pulling all the strings together, and I think you have done a very admirable job. So congratulations and thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the spirit of renewed co-operation and collaboration, I shall be very brief. I have a few questions for the minister, if he would care to listen, on a subject that is very dear to my heart, and that is the Blue Lake Centre just north of Hinton. Blue Lake Centre has been in the news in my riding. Of course, it hasn't quite reached Edmonton, but it has been in the news in my riding because it has been on the block. It has been open for bids in the government's attempt to privatize everything that moves. So Blue Lake Centre, too, is on the block. Now, this is a centre that offers courses on leadership and all kinds of activities such as white water canoeing and kayaking, cross-country skiing, et cetera. I've personally enjoyed quite a few courses there, and I can vouch for it being an excellent centre.

Now, the question, of course, is: what is going to happen to this centre if and when it finally is sold? About a year ago, I think, the decision was made in the corridors of power that it was time to sell Blue Lake Centre as part of the government's attempt to sell off any outfit that was not running a profit, and in some cases even those that were making a profit. Since that time it has taken the department until about January of this year to finally come up with specs and open up the process for bids. My first question is to the minister: why did it take so unbelievably long to put those specs together? Then on we go. The postponement came about because it was decided that there first ought to be a showing of the place to the prospective buyers. Finally all the bids were in. A decision is imminent, I think. I'd like the minister to speak about that as well. In the meantime, though, it has been far too late for any prospective buyer to cash in on the summer rush.

The plot thickened as all this went on, because sometime last fall it turned out that the Department of National Defence displayed some interest in purchasing Blue Lake Centre. They have a survival school nearby at Jarvis Lake, and they decided that it might be a good idea to pop across the highway there and take over this centre. Now, the people in the area, in my constituency, myself included, are not particularly keen on the military moving in there. We don't like military invasions. There are two good reasons for that, Mr. Chairman. There's an economic reason, because instead of there being two establishments, there would be only one, and hence there would be less employment and less purchasing power. Then there's also the military reason. The military is not known to cater to civilians, and there was a fear that programs would disappear. On top of that the Department of National Defence is in the throes of its own retrenchment, and therefore they are not quite considered a reliable tenant, I would say. Certainly they don't have a very long future in that regard. A question to the minister: did the Department of National Defence ever offer to pay and, if so, how much?

Then there was another wrinkle that showed up. The manager of the centre, who has been caretaking for over a year, presumably at a salary that he received before that time – probably the highest paid caretaker in Alberta. The question for the minister: how much did this caretaker make while he was taking care? He

has shown the centre to all prospective buyers, always disclaiming any interest in buying the place for himself. Now it turns out that as the buyers' names become public, lo and behold, this caretaker is one of the prospective buyers. Question: why did the minister allow this situation to occur? Now, I've been approached by several prospective buyers about what they view as irregular bidding procedures. They're concerned about this caretaker having the inside track, and they're talking about demanding an investigation. I've been able to kind of sit on this request, because it seems to me that we first should find out which way the decision is going to go. After that we can always see. Those are the complaints that my constituents have about the department's handling of this whole business: the interest of the military and the bidding process.

9:40

I have another complaint, which is shared by many of my constituents, and that is the absolute exclusion of any local people from involvement in this whole issue. Now, picture this, Mr. Chairman. Here's a centre which happens to be located in the riding of West Yellowhead, and all the decisions regarding that centre are made in Edmonton. People in the area are not asked for their opinion. I happen to be their legally elected representative. Do I get asked for an opinion on this? Absolutely not. They tell me, "Do something," and I say that I have absolutely no input; there is no possibility. I find that a very sad situation that I don't really understand at all.

To top it off, one of these constituents who is a prospective buyer made an appointment to see the minister, who very kindly agreed to see him. Then the constituent made the unfortunate mistake of asking me to come along. So on the eve of the appointed hour I called the minister's office and said: "I'll be coming along. Just let the minister know." Half an hour later my constituent called to say that the appointment has been canceled. Needless to say, I got on the phone immediately, spoke to the executive assistant of the minister, who said: "Oh, it must be a coincidence. The minister is busy." Well, those are the kinds of coincidences that you can smell a mile away. I don't believe in them. Secondly, the executive assistant had the audacity to say: you were not invited. No, I wasn't, but I was trying to represent the interests of my constituents. I was very disappointed by the minister's actions, and I must say there are other ministers on that side who are far more accommodating to members on this side of the House. In short, I'm disappointed with that, and I ask the minister why he acted so high-handedly instead of sitting down with me and solving these problems together.

Mr. Chairman, I won't belabour this too much. I've made my points, and I'll ask the minister to reply to my questions. Thank you.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Chairman, I have a few comments that I would like to make. I know we're a little bit pressed for time. I would like to begin by talking about the question of the women's advisory council. I can remember that the women's advisory council was set up in 1986. It was one of the first significant pieces of legislation that was dealt with by this Legislature when I was first elected. It was a time of apparent promise for some breakthroughs in an area which I believe addresses if not the, one of the most important equality, fairness, justice issues that face our society today, and that is the question of the status of women in our society.

It is always very risky for men to discuss that issue in one sense; on the other hand I believe that it is men who are a huge part of the problem. I'm not casting aspersions or impugning the

motives or intentions of men in this province or any men in this Legislature, but I believe that there is a prejudice against women in our society. It is a very subtle and it is a very insidious prejudice. It is particularly insidious, Mr. Chairman, because it is so subtle. What is not so subtle is how it is manifested. It is manifested in very concrete ways if only members of our society, members of this Legislature could step back, gain some perspective, and imagine, in the case of men, what it would be like to be treated as a woman is often treated within our society.

How is that inequality manifested? It's manifested in the money that women are paid. While it happens less often than it used to, it still happens that women are paid less in our society from time to time and far too frequently for one reason and one reason alone, and that is because they are women. That is an unacceptable prejudice. It is not enough to say that we are comfortable with the relationship that we have with women in our society and that they have with men and that they have towards society more generally and therefore it's okay and everything seems to be working. It is a very insidious, it is a very corrosive – it is very subtle, yes; nonetheless, it is a very substantial prejudice.

It is manifest in the fact that women are often paid less. It is manifest in the fact that they are paid less, frequently because they are women, that there are groups of employees who are largely women who are paid less than other groups of employees who are largely men but may not be as well qualified or work under the same difficult conditions and so on. It is manifest because there is overt violence against women both inside the home and outside the home in our society but so frequently inside the home. In fact it's been said that in our society one of the least safe places for a woman to find herself can often be in her home. Violence against women, Mr. Chairman, is an absolutely unacceptable element, an unacceptable condition in our society.

This Legislature has become far too complacent about that issue, the sense of inequality of pay, the sense of inequality in many other ways, and certainly about the issue of violence against women. The minister who is responsible for those kinds of issues simply cannot say that he is doing enough for that issue on the one hand and then turn around and do away with the women's advisory council, which is at least one albeit small but not insignificant beacon of hope and beacon of advocacy for women on issues that affect women more than they affect men in our society.

I believe, in fact, that the minister's predecessor in this portfolio prior to the last election, Elaine McCoy, was very, very frustrated by the circumstance within which she found herself in her caucus, a caucus that could not grasp the significance of these issues, that was complacent in the face of these issues. She was an advocate for those issues, and I respected the fact that she did not simply take the party line. She fought and was outspoken about those issues quite beyond what the realm of discipline that was imposed upon that cabinet would normally have allowed. She stood for those things. This minister, on the other hand, makes his first major gesture in this area the demise of the women's advisory council. It is not a huge amount of money. Yes, he can be frustrated, but maybe he should do something about it. He has power to address one of the most significant issues in this society today, one of the most significant justice, fairness, equality issues, and he's walking out. I believe, Mr. Chairman . . . [interjections] Sorry; he's not walking out.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that this is an area where this Legislature, where MLAs can do something, can accomplish something significant and that it doesn't just help women. It helps all of us, because it elevates the dignity, it elevates the decency within our society.

9:50

I would also like to address, Mr. Chairman, the question of the Human Rights Commission, the Individual's Rights Protection Act, and the ruling of the courts most recently about including sexual preference in that Act. I would like to acknowledge the courage in this case of the minister who spoke out against what has been the traditional and consistent and I would say pernicious view of his caucus, which is to say that those rights should not be recognized in the Individual's Rights Protection Act. The minister demonstrated a great deal of courage and of commitment to his values and his principles to stand up and say that he realizes that including this particular element in the Individual's Rights Protection Act does not extend rights; it simply secures rights that are available to everybody else in our society. We need not be fearful of that. In fact, we should be reminded of that statement wherein the author said – and I paraphrase broadly – that, you know, they came to take somebody else, and I wasn't one of them, so I didn't do anything. Eventually they came to take somebody else and somebody else, and I didn't do anything in any of those cases, and finally they came to take me, and there was nobody left to protect me.

I think what we have to remember is that rights in our society, that the veneer of civilization in our society is not always as secure as we might think. There are societies around this world who are experiencing how insecure their rights can be and how capriciously their rights can be treated. I think, Mr. Chairman, that the minister is to be congratulated for acknowledging as he did in the face of opposition in his own caucus, in the face of a difficult opposition in his own caucus, that it is very, very important that that court case, that the law of the land be upheld by this government. I will say, of course that this isn't the first time this government has been in contravention of the law, but it is very important that they do the right thing in this particular case.

I would like to mention cultural funding, and I want to make just a very brief statement. I believe this government has a sense that multiculturalism and cultural pursuits are not as significant as we believe they are. I will say that when people begin to diminish the importance of other people's culture, what they do is demean and diminish the importance of the very essence of those other people. A person's culture is integral to what they are as a person, to their spirit, to their sense of place, to what they are as a human being. If we are not cautious about the way we treat culture and if we do not value and promote multiculturalism at least to the extent that this government has done it, then, Mr. Chairman, we begin to diminish the importance that we place on other people; we begin to diminish the dignity and the decency with which we treat other people. In this process of cutting costs and in this process of restructuring many of the programs that are fundamental to our society, let's never lose sight of the importance of cultural pursuits, of multicultural recognition in our society, because it gives it a strength and it gives it a value that pure economics simply and utterly can never attain.

Seniors. There are many things that need to be said here. What I want to say briefly, Mr. Chairman, is that the government is saying one thing and doing many other things. They have said that they are not reducing benefits to seniors with over \$10,000 of earnings, that in fact they'll get \$26 more per year. Well, for example, they were eligible for \$960 in dental benefits over a two-year period; now they will get \$760 less in dental benefits over each two-year period.

There are many examples of how seniors have been targeted in these government cuts. I can look at their marginal tax rate, for

example, after you add in the requirement that they now pay health care premiums, and what we begin to see is a very specific targeting of seniors, an attack on seniors, a group of people who above all other people in our society, in our province cannot recover from arbitrary rules changes once they have set their retirements in place. They live on fixed incomes, and they cannot alter what they bought, the level of housing, the kind of jobs that they decided to take, how they spent their money. They do not have the same kinds of flexibility.

If ever I have seen a smugness and an arrogance in this government, it is amongst this group of MLAs who are very secure, who are very arrogant in the way that they have approached these things, who have a level of financial security that many, many, many people in this society simply do not have. They do not imagine what it is like to be a senior earning \$10,432. You know what I've always said, Mr. Chairman? One thing that distinguishes many Conservatives is that they cannot imagine what it is like to be somebody else. They are arrogant about the way they impose their values on other people, and this is a case where they are doing it.

I want to close by saying, Mr. Chairman, that I share many of the concerns expressed by my colleague from Edmonton-Avonmore wherein he noted that if the Minister of Community Development isn't careful, he may in fact cause his department to disappear. Now, he will gain great appeal amongst the members in his backbench, but he will not have fulfilled his responsibility and his mandate. Wouldn't it be quite a political career that could rest knowing that he came in with the responsibility for women, for culture, for seniors, for multiculturalism and he dispensed with that responsibility? Then he will become known as the minister of community demisement, with his feet on the chair, and we know that that isn't to occur any longer. He may be frustrated, but he can listen.

Between the lines it appears that this portfolio may have been given one year or so to prove its worth or risk obliteration. I would feel much more comfortable if we had a minister who was up to the task of proving his worth in this portfolio. Let's see some fire. Let's see some fight. Let's see some advocacy for those values that you represent that are critical to the dignity, to the decency, to the sense of our society.

There are in fact some concrete indications that point to the possible obliteration of this department. For example, major mandates such as the Percy Page Centre are being transferred out of the department over to the newly amalgamated foundation. The urban parks program has been transferred to Municipal Affairs, and you know what happens when something gets caught in that vortex.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. members, the Chair has been relatively lenient this evening, but there are some matters of courtesy that seem to be forgotten by a number of people. It is not polite to sit with your back to the Chair for prolonged periods of time and engage in lively conversations. The noise level is going up. I wonder if we could calm it down. I wonder if we could remember some of those things.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I continue to point out that there are indications that point to the possible obliteration of this department. The urban parks program has been transferred to Municipal Affairs, and the Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation has been amalgamated with the Sport

Council. Finally, we look at the MRTA program, the municipal recreation/tourism areas program, and we wonder if the minister is also considering transferring this program out of his department and/or eliminating it to the detriment of the rural areas.

I will summarize, Mr. Chairman, by saying that Conservative governments – and certainly this one is typical – think that the one overriding objective in constructing or developing, creating a stronger society is to make more money and pay lower taxes. Every one of us wants the people of Alberta to have greater wealth and to keep more of it for themselves, to pay lower taxes. But we must never, ever, ever lose sight that there are a range of other values that give true value, true depth of value to a society.

In a headlong rush to obliterate the deficit, in a way that I think largely is being utilized to mask an ideological agenda, what we see here is the potential to kill a department that works to lend something more than simply lowering taxes and making more money, Mr. Chairman. What we see is a department that if it is managed and run properly within a cabinet, that if it is managed by a cabinet minister who has a vision and who can see the mandate for what it can be and for what it must be, we see a department that can play a significant role at an efficient cost – and that is important – in cultural pursuits, in multicultural promotion, in promotion of human rights, of rights for every single Albertan of equality, of justice, of fairness for women, of a sense of equality and fairness for seniors. What we have seen here in this rookie cabinet minister is none of the fire and none of the passion and none of the commitment that you need to make this department work in the way that it should work to make this society better.

10:00

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Given the hour of now past 10 o'clock, I move that the committee do rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Sohal in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[On motion, the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of the Whole]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

Bill 2
Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks
and Wildlife Foundation Act

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by simply circulating this amendment after you've . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: We appear not to have voted on the amendment that you've made already. Don't introduce another one. Would you like to move the previous amendment that you made?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, I can do that, or we can vote on that one at the same time, if you like, that we vote on this one, whatever your process calls for.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. We don't have two at the same time.

Hon. members of the committee, we have under consideration the amendment that was moved by Edmonton-Avonmore that Bill 2 be amended by striking out section 7 and substituting the following:

If the Minister and the Foundation consider it necessary, the Minister may provide to the Foundation the services of employees of the Government under the Minister's administration to assist with the work of the Foundation, at no cost to the Foundation.

That amendment we don't have a vote on yet.

Were you wishing to move that now, that the question be put?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes, I would do that now.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm disappointed that that was in fact defeated. I didn't think it was asking too much of the government to in fact allow the foundation to not be charged for some of the services that it might find itself having to provide, but it appears that that's not the desire of the government opposite.

Nonetheless, I would like to present one final amendment with regard to Bill 2. This Bill, of course, is the proposed amalgamation of the Alberta Sport Council with the Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. My concern this evening is with regard to section 10, wherein the Bill suggests that this newly created foundation is in fact an agent of the Crown. I would like to submit an amendment that would clarify that this agency would become an arm's-length agency of the Crown. That having been said, I would like to circulate this amendment, which has already been provided to the Table in front.

Mr. Chairman, as we review Bill 2, again a few very straightforward issues have to be resolved in order for us to even begin the possible embracing of the new directions unfolded by this Bill. We are again not opposed to streamlining delivery of services to Albertans, but in this instance I think what has to be pointed out very clearly is that we see a takeover and a real, I think, purposeful move by government to control yet another organization that up until now has operated very well on its own in an arm's-length capacity. We have already endured some great debate from both sides with regard to an earlier clause wherein the government stated that it now wants to take that need for control one step further by placing an MLA to sit on this board. Now we have an opportunity to try and distance that control a little bit by suggesting that this foundation at least technically be given the authority to operate in a semiautonomous fashion.

There is nothing harmful with this amendment whatsoever, Mr. Chairman. In fact, quite to the contrary, I think this is something that might be received as very helpful. Certainly those many volunteers who comprise this particular foundation, this newly

amalgamated foundation, would welcome a statement such as this being included in this Bill as it's being pushed through. We have traditionally seen these volunteer networks work very, very hard to bring to the people of Alberta the kinds of programs in the sports area and the recreation, parks, and wildlife area that are so highly valued by Albertans right across the province. Here we already have to put up with the notion that government somehow wants to move into this area and take it all over almost for itself, I suppose primarily because there is something like \$14 million involved here by way of grants. These dollars go into very needed programs across the province of Alberta, and I think the government would do very well to step back at least one full step from direct domination over those dollars. One way of doing that would be to embrace this particular amendment.

10:10

The net effect of it would then, I think, give the volunteers who comprise the board a feeling that their time is also worth something. The expertise that they bring to the table would also be valued in a different way. Otherwise these types of commissions and boards and councils and foundations and so on risk being looked at as mere extensions or puppets of the government, and I know that that's not the intention of the minister, at least I hope it's not. This would be one way that he could prove in fact to Albertans that he does not want to interfere with the free-flowing operation of such a wonderfully run foundation.

We've seen already on an earlier amendment that the government has voted down the idea of not charging the foundation for some of the services that it might provide to it or some of the programs that it's going to ask the foundation to take over. I don't know why that was defeated. No reasons, of course, have been given, other than the vote.

So here as we move through this very, very critical final stage of this Bill, I'm making one last and rather desperate plea to the government to please not put at risk something which has worked so very well for them up until now. They've already decided, Mr. Chairman, that they must have more control by putting an MLA on there, and I fear that by not allowing this amendment to go through, they are really putting even more clamps onto a body that otherwise would continue to work in the fine traditions of the last several years.

We are talking about one of the oldest, if not the oldest, foundation that is supported by lottery dollars in the province of Alberta. We're talking about a foundation here and a group of individuals that span into several dozen people now, who have contributed countless hours and have also gone out and sought countless donations, by way of bequeaths and bequests from other individuals in their wills to turn over large, open spaces and tracts of land to this RPW Foundation, and somehow we ought pay them the respect that they deserve. By not embracing this amendment, Mr. Chairman, what the government may be clearly telling people is that it doesn't trust the decisions that otherwise are being made by groups of volunteers.

So that takes us to that entire area and that great concern surrounding what the qualifications are of some of the people who sit on these boards. We know, because we've been told by government, that they go through some sort of a screening process to allow the people to come onto these boards and that these are not mere political or patronage type appointments. With my heart I would like to believe that, but as you take a look at it, sometimes there's a risk that it has been happening. So here an opportunity, and I should say an excellent opportunity, exists for the government to steer far away from that and to regain some of the trust that otherwise may have been lost.

The government, as we have seen, is moving very, very quickly with many things in regard to cuts and amalgamations, all in the interests of the mighty dollar only, and this is not something that can be equated to money necessarily because it's the principle of the thing that we're arguing about here.

When these foundations were set up, as I have said before and I will reiterate again, they were set up to absolutely complement government programs. They were set up to fill voids in government programs, and they were set up to be in fact arm's length. All I'm asking for here is the support of the House to restore that point of principle by suggesting again that they can operate in a free manner. That is the surest way to be clear that decisions will be made based on the merit of the project and based on the expertise and the tremendous amount of talent that the volunteers on these boards bring to the table. Otherwise we would risk seeing too much interference, and if it's not going to be direct interference, then at least there's going to be the inference that there's interference here. So my plea to the government opposite is that they allow this simple amendment to go through, if nothing else but on a point of principle that would allow the newly amalgamated foundation to operate in a fashion that at least doesn't have the appearance of being totally government dominated and in this case government controlled.

I know I suggested I would be very brief in these comments, and I would ask now that one of my other colleagues simply supplement a part of the argument surrounding this amendment. I would at the same time also ask government, when this particular amendment comes up for a vote, that they strongly consider the implications of saying no to this particular amendment. It deserves some support, and I would thank you for that support on behalf of all Albertans.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak in support of this amendment. I do so on several grounds. The first is that the purpose of consolidation of these two foundations – it will save money. There will be efficiency gains. No one is denying that this is a good move. That is not the issue. We, too, on this side of the House would like to see such foundations run as efficiently as possible so they can disburse as much money as possible without administrative overheads, a tax on volunteerism.

But the issue that my colleague from Edmonton-Avonmore has brought forward is the fact that in this particular foundation you're relying on volunteer effort. There is the fact that individuals will donate cash, and they will donate land to this newly consolidated foundation. It must be the case from the perspective of individuals that this is seen to be arm's length. The fact that the government is going to such an extent as to appoint an MLA – and it will be a government MLA – clearly will send out a signal that this may not be as arm's length as it ought to be. If the purpose of such foundations is to promote volunteerism, if the purpose is to try and get individuals to freely contribute of their time, their effort, their land, their money, then one would hope, Mr. Chairman, that every effort would be made to make sure that such institutions are arm's length. Having an MLA on the board sends out the wrong signals entirely.

So if this government truly wants to be seen as open, if it truly wants to promote independent decision-making that reflects community interests, then I would urge government members, members on this side of this House to consider this amendment as being nonpartisan, as an effort to promote volunteerism in this province. We have an admirable record in this regard, and we feel that this amendment will simply promote that to an even

greater extent. It is not a vexatious amendment. It is really an amendment that says: look, this is a foundation which wants to bring the best out of Albertans through their time, their effort, and their contributions, and it will be seen as nonpartisan. That's very important, Mr. Chairman.

So with those comments I will conclude. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that we call for the question on Bill 5 at this stage.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bill 2.

MR. DAY: Two. I said two. I know it sounded like five.

10:20

MR. CHAIRMAN: I, too, thought you said two. Are you ready, then, for the question?

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 2 agreed to]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported when the committee rises and reports.

[Motion carried]

Bill 5 Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 1994

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a reminder, then, Committee of the Whole. We are now considering Bill 5, Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 1994. We do have a number of amendments that we have considered, and we're now on A3. We better read it so everybody knows which one it is. This is the amendment that was moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-West on behalf of Calgary-Buffalo?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: No, it's my amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right. Bow Valley is speaking on it. We're just trying to find a copy so that we can let everybody know what the amendment is that we're supposed to be speaking to. While we're finding it, Bow Valley, if you could enlighten us further as to why you support this amendment or perhaps even oppose it.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's certainly an honour to address the Assembly again tonight. However, in view of the whatever, I conclude my remarks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's very difficult to follow such a succinct set of comments. I would like to speak in favour of the amendment. Let me again say that if you read the comments of the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, this amendment and the subsequent ones are not meant to be partisan. It is really a question of the drafting of this, what the intent is, and our

goal is to raise some issues of concern and through the amendments then suggest how these issues of concern could be corrected.

The amendment that has been brought forward by my colleague for Fort McMurray concerns section 93(3). As it presently reads:

A lien under this section shall be first and prior to any other lien, charge, mortgage or other security interest, with respect to the interest of a defaulting working interest participant in the well and any other wells, lands and equipment, petroleum substances and production facilities.

The amendment that is proposed, then, is to substitute "subordinate" for "first and prior."

The issue here relates to some of the mechanics of this process. There is nothing in this Bill, Mr. Chairman, that relates to the process of registration. That is very important, the whole issue of registration of liens. Because again financial markets are very concerned about encumbrances on property. If there's uncertainty about the structure of encumbrances, if they should exist, how do they respond? Well, all members on that side of the House profess a belief in markets, and they realize that in the world as uncertainty increases, what's the cost? The cost is that higher interest will be charged on any such loans. So one of the issues is really one of registration. The other is just simply the whole issue of the timing of the lien. When is it registered? How is it registered? When does it come into effect? So there are a number of issues here that are not really very straightforward. In fact, they're not in the Bill as drafted.

The issue that my hon. colleague from Fort McMurray had raised was that the intent of this Bill then clearly reads that first claim for the fund will be the government. What this implies, from the perspective of financial institutions, is that their claims, mortgages and the like, will be subordinate. Again, there is a cost to that, Mr. Chairman. Although this deals with orphaned wells, in some cases there are orphaned wells that exist because firms refuse to pay, and there may be these encumbrances out there. We're not talking about wells that are totally unknown. There are instances where there is simply refusal to pay. So there are concerns about what this implies about the cost of capital, particularly to junior firms. Certainly the members on that side of the House and on this side of the House view small business and junior oil firms as being a vital driving force in the Alberta economy. Certainly it's clear. You look at the Calgary economy. They played a very positive and significant role in maintaining the vitality of that economy.

So the amendment as brought forward by my colleague in fact would subordinate this encumbrance to these other interests. Now, why might one want to do that? That is the issue. Why might one want to do that? Is there a reason one might do that? The first issue is the issue of uncertainty and the effect that this has on interest rates or the cost to finance to firms.

Before I conclude my remarks – and I'm going to make them brief on this – let me just give you an example of why this is important. In the province of Alberta, dating from the Great Depression, one of the features that Albertans have enjoyed is that they can walk away from their mortgage, unless it's a CMHC. In any other province if you walk away, often what will occur is that you will be pursued to the ends of the Earth by financial institutions who will sue you to make up whatever the realized market value is of the house once it's sold and the mortgage that was outstanding. In this province you can in fact – it's the dollar sales, Mr. Chairman, that occurred in '81-82, and it's still possible, then, in some instances to in a sense be able to walk away from your mortgage. You lose your equity clearly, and you lose any investment you have in there. When the house is sold, if the sale value of the house is less than the mortgage, it is the

bank that's left holding the bag. In other provinces, other jurisdictions what happens often is that – this won't happen if it's a CMHC mortgage – they will pursue you, they will sue you, they will garnishee your money, they will come after you. That is the nature of banks. It is the nature of financial institutions. They want it now, and they'll get it any way they can. That's obviously what they're in the business for, and you've made a contract.

What happens in this type of environment though, Mr. Chairman, is that you can't have a variety of interest rates. What happens is that you tend to ration credit. You will find, then, that people who would otherwise appear to be credit worthy may not be able to get mortgages because the banks are concerned that there's a higher probability to default because there's not that penalty that goes with it. So in an example like that what happens is that markets work. There is no free lunch in our society.

In this case what happens is a rationing of credit. It's very difficult, then, for some individuals to get credit, so they're screened out of the market. In this particular example what will happen is that banks will be able to charge different rates of interest. They'll put the firms coming forward in some sort of a risk ranking to the extent that the companies will now find themselves subordinate to the claim of the government, and there's this uncertainty related to whether or not a lien actually exists and whether it's been registered. When it comes into effect, this will have some admittedly small effect on the cost of capital of these firms. But the point, Mr. Chairman, is that it will have an effect. It should be clearly set out in the Bill and it should be clearly set out by the minister in her introductory comments, the nature of what this implies as to the primacy that's set out in section 93.1(3).

10:30

So the intent, then, of the motion brought forward by my colleague from Fort McMurray is to bring this issue to the fore and to ensure, then, that the issues related to cost of capital, particularly for junior firms in industry, are cleared up. That is the intent. It is not a partisan issue. We just would like these issues clearly discussed and put on the record as to what really occurs as a consequence of this Bill. If it's a drafting error, fine. If it's not, then let's discuss what ought to be done. This amendment proposes a solution.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question on the amendment – the Chair apologizes for having called it A3; it is in fact A2. We did have the right mover. The question has been called?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray, you're . . .

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Chairman, I should advise the house that I intend to present on behalf of my colleague from Calgary two additional amendments on section 15. [interjection] Yes, Calgary-West.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. GERMAIN: Then on my own behalf I intend to present certain amendments tonight. If I might, while this first one is being circulated, Mr. Chairman, advise the House that I will attempt to make my comments this evening as short and to the

point on each of these amendments as is possible. I have decided that I will adopt a Supreme Court of Canada approach to making these submissions. That approach basically is to treat each word as if it were gold and to deal only with the crux of the issue and assume that everybody who is hearing the matter has already briefed themselves as to the issues. So I will direct your attention to the section of the Act that I intend to amend, then indicate what I think the mischief is in the section and what the proposed amendment seeks to do.

So if you want to look at Bill 5 now in this same section that we are in, we are working in section 15 of the Bill, which adds section 93.1 to this particular legislation and the various subsections therein. We continue the debate on the issue of the lien that is created by the attempts on the part of the board and the government to recover money for wells that have not been properly reclaimed by the person responsible. I spoke at length yesterday about the concern that I had about there not being any protection of bona fide lenders who lend to oil company concerns. I was concerned about that. I believe that even though the amendment has failed in the last vote we took, that will come back in some fashion to haunt the government.

Now, this amendment is an extension of that principle. Putting the amendment succinctly, it proposes adding a subparagraph to subparagraph (3) of this amendment, and that subparagraph will provide:

Prior to any lien, described in subsection (3)(a) taking effect, such lien must be registered in accordance with the Personal Property Security Act and shall take priority only over securities filed after that date.

Now, this is a philosophical issue, ladies and gentlemen, and the issue is whether the Crown should have a priority over any other security interest without any definition in the Act of when that lien is created and without any definition in the Act as to where you can search for a lien or where you can even protect yourself as a lender. We have here a lien that is created and comes into existence without even any registration whatsoever to protect the financial community.

Now, you can sit there and say: it's 10:30 at night, and we'll wait till this fellow stops talking and we'll vote against this amendment. But think about it from a fairness point of view. Reach out and consider the position of lenders in the province of Alberta. Do you want to have people liable to lose their priority when they can't even go anywhere and search to see if something like this is lurking about? Is that fair, and is that reasonable? I would urge all members of this Assembly when the question is called to vote in favour of this amendment.

It is not unreasonable for a bank or a financial institution not to be blindsided. How many times in sports have we heard the expression, "Don't blindside me"? How many times in business have we heard the expression, "Don't blindside me"? Ask yourself if it's fair that the financial community in this province should be exposed to losing the priority of their securities without even an opportunity to search anywhere and without even having a crystallization date of a lien. If you think that is good legislation, if you think that is fair legislation, vote down this amendment, and I'll get on with my other amendments. If you have a concern, as I do, you will vote to include this amendment in the legislation at this time.

That concludes my argument on this amendment.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question has been called. Are you ready for the question? We're considering A3, the third amendment.

This one is moved by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray on behalf of his colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Do not turn the page, ladies and gentlemen. Stay right on the section that we've been talking about, which in the Act is the new section 93.1. Cast your eye all the way down the page to section (7) and see if we want in this province to start criminalizing people who ignore the payment of legal debts. The amendment that is going to be handed out and is being handed out even as I speak, members of this Assembly, deals with section . . . [interjection] I'm sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if you'd just give us a moment to let people pass the amendments around.

MR. GERMAIN: Yeah. I'm on a tight time limit.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fort McMurray, we're now ready to begin.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. All right. Now, while we're waiting for the amendment to come out, let's not waste the time of the Assembly. Let's look at what section (7) of this legislation says. Section (7) of this legislation says this. If you're served with one of these lien notices, you will, if you fail to pay – it says: "A person who fails to comply with a lien notice is guilty of an offence." Can you imagine that legislation? Can you think about that? There isn't even a provision in that section that says: if you fail without reasonable or lawful excuse. Surely you should have the right to refuse payment for reasonable or lawful excuse and not be subjected to an offence. Nowhere else in Alberta law, my friends, does it make you guilty of an offence if you fail to honour a garnishee, which is really what this is. This piece of legislation is a garnishee. It directs somebody who owes money to a defaulting oilman to pay the money over to the government to recover abandoned well costs.

Now, the proposed amendment that is being circulated now does two things. First of all, it removes the criminality, and secondly, it provides that there can be lawful excuse. What it does is make the person to whom the lien is directed obliged to pay the debt if the Court of Queen's Bench agrees. So the new amended section (7), if you agree with this amendment – and it won't interfere, I must tell you, and I give the Assembly my assurances now that this amendment will fit like a hand in a glove to the existing legislation – will simply read as follows: A person who

without reasonable excuse or lawful justification is liable for amount of the lien, enforcement of which may be taken as if the lien was a garnishee issued by the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta.

So instead of "is guilty of an offence," we provide in there a mechanism whereby they can show that they have lawful justification to avoid payment.

10:40

Do not in your haste and eagerness to slam this amendment tonight turn your back on good constructive criticism. Do not in your eagerness to slam this amendment tonight start criminalizing people in this province for failure to pay their debts. My friends, we threw out the concept of debtors' prisons in this country a long time ago. Let us not introduce it now in our zeal to recover money for the government on abandoned wells. There is nothing whatsoever partisan. There is nothing wrong with this amend-

ment, and I urge you to resoundingly vote yes for this amendment when the question is called.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. GERMAIN: Well, if we could paraphrase an old phrase, they say: debate in haste; repent at leisure, Mr. Chairman.

I turn now to my proposed amendment to section 10 of this particular legislation, and I want to tell you what section 10 does. Section 10 of this particular legislation permits the board to shut down, if you can believe it, to take the draconian step of shutting down an oil well or an oil sands project for not paying the enhancement levy. That's what section 10 does. In an oil and gas province, in a province of oil sands, of oil industry job creation, section 10 says that if an oil company does not pay its levy, by golly, the board can shut down the oil well or shut down the oil sands plant. Does that sound harsh? Does that sound draconian? Does that sound abrupt? I suggest that it does.

What this particular amendment that is now being circulated does is allow a cooling off period. It adds into section 10 of this legislation, which in turn then amends section 53(3) of the legislation, a cooling off period. Now, what is the time of the cooling off period? The time of the cooling off period is to at least allow the appeal period to expire. Does it seem reasonable that before you would shut down an oil plant or shut down an oil well that at least the fellow could exhaust his appeal procedure? Does that seem reasonable to anybody in this Assembly? I suggest that it does.

It also says that the board has to try and collect by conventional methods the debt for at least a year. Do we want to shut down an oil sands plant or an oil well creating employment because someone has not paid their levy into this fund, or do we want to allow the other collection process, which the government attracts to itself, to be tried for a year?

Finally, my friends, if the board has to take the draconian step of shutting down an oil sands plant or an oil well, then the section provides that at least the board will give 90 days' notice to the oil sands plant or the oil sands facility prior to shutdown. Does that seem unreasonable?

I urge the Members of this Legislative Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment, which provides a balance to the board's power and ability to close down facilities for nonpayment of these levies. That's my submission on that amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have before us then for our consideration amendment A5, which is the amendment that has been moved by Fort McMurray on Bill 5. All those in favour of amendment A5, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Defeated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No way.

MRS. HEWES: What did you declare, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair heard it as defeated. If that is not so, there is a provision. Hon. Member for Fort McMurray? Sorry; were you . . .

MR. GERMAIN: Oh, no. I was on the next amendment, sir. Did you rule that that last question was passed?

MR. CHAIRMAN: There was a momentary question as to whether the Chair had spoken loud enough that the amendment had been defeated. [interjections] Stand up then.

MR. GERMAIN: All right. Well, let me take the Assembly to the next amendment then, on 56.3(2). We're amending section 11 now, and let me say that the purpose of this amendment is to deal with the penalty fee found in section 56.3(2), which is found on page 7 of the Bill, to assist the members of the Assembly.

I should say, Mr. Chairman, that on this particular sheet of paper that is being handed out there are two amendments presented. I would ask the Assembly to vote separately on the two amendments, but to save time this evening I will consolidate my comments and speak to both of them at once. So I'm asking the House to vote separately, but I will not speak after the first vote is taken.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's agreed. We'll call the first one, which is B, A6, and the second one we'll call A7.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hold on. We don't have it yet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think it's delivered to your spot, hon. minister.

Hon. members, the Chair just a few moments ago held up the speaker to the amendments because the amendments had not been distributed. The deputy House leader then proceeded to tell the Chair that it was all right to let them go, that the minister had copies and to please go ahead. I'm happy to comply with either, but I do have to have a direction from the deputy House leader as to which procedure they want.

Hon. House leader, is all right to proceed? All right.

MR. EVANS: It certainly is, Mr. Chairman. That's a very good way to proceed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Okay. If you look at the amendments that are being handed out – and while they're being handed out, I'll speak to the first issue. If you look on page 7 of the Bill, section 56.3(2), it prescribes that a person who fails to pay an abandonment fund levy will "pay a penalty equal to 25% of the abandonment fund levy." I must say to you and to the members of this House that I do not as a matter of policy agree with the concept of penalties that are based on a percentage. The more fair, the more equitable, and the more appropriate approach is to call for the payment of interest. I mean, we had this problem in municipal taxation for many years in the province of Alberta where if

people missed the tax deadline, they'd pay a 25 percent penalty. So they wouldn't pay their taxes. They'd wait the whole of next year because it was costing them 25 percent already. Here this thing is worse than that because it doesn't even say how many times it cycles. What happens if a person doesn't pay for 10 years? Do they get away with 25 percent penalty for 10 years, or are we better off substituting it and replacing it with interest?

Our proposed amendment to this section is to replace the 25 percent penalty concept with the interest phraseology in accordance with the Judgment Interest Act. I must tell all members of the Assembly that the Judgment Interest Act is a government Bill that allows the government by regulation to set an appropriate interest rate each year based on market conditions.

10:50

If I carry on with the commentaries – but remember, Mr. Chairman, calling for two separate votes – if I address the Legislative Assembly on section 56.7, 56.7 will be a new section that is proposed to be added because in 56.6, which is found on page 8, we again have the very draconian provision that an oil sands plant or a well can be shut down for nonpayment of the levy. So my argument on this section parallels and mirrors the argument that I made on the last section and that is that that draconian step of shutdown should not take place and should not occur until all the appeals have been exhausted. Is that fair and reasonable? Certainly it's fair and reasonable, and it should also not take place until other conventional collection efforts have seen fit to be tried for at least a year. Finally, the facility that's proposed to be shut down should be given an additional 90 days' notice. That is fair and reasonable, and as a result I would ask the members of this Assembly to support this amendment.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question has been called. Are you ready for the question? We're considering first of all the vote on the amendment called A6 as moved by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll now move to the next amendment which was agreed to, A7, moved by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray. [interjections] We're on the second amendment by Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: I had made a commitment that I would consolidate my comments into my first submission, sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. We're living by it.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MRS. LAING: Can't we just vote once?

MR. GERMAIN: No, we can't vote once, ma'am, because we want the record to show what's of interest to you and what's of interest to us.

MRS. LAING: You could give us the amendments all at once.

MR. GERMAIN: Yes, well, you raise an interesting point, member opposite. I provided the minister with the amendments at the request of the House leader . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Through the Chair.

MR. GERMAIN: I am speaking to you, sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good. You said I'd raised an interesting point.

MR. GERMAIN: Yes. And I do want to point out, Mr. Chairman, that the two amendments that I'm presenting now, contained on the last page, will be the last handout tonight, and after the vote is taken on these two amendments, this will conclude my proposed amendments to Bill 5, this very important Bill that was to be housekeeping only for the industry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, for clarification: the one that's shown as E we'll call A8. Are you making these two as one amendment?

MR. GERMAIN: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Two. All right. So it's A8 and A9. Thank you.

Go ahead.

MR. GERMAIN: Okay. We turn to these amendments. We turn to section 14 of the Act, based on the amendment numbering, where the government proposes to add to certain sections – 92.1. Now, what this is: remember we're talking about an Act that will allow the board or other oil companies to go into other people's land for the purpose of doing repair and rectification. Now, what we have of concern on this particular section is this: the landowner is left out of this equation. The landowner, the person who will face the trespass, is not consulted, advised, forewarned in any way based on this legislation. So we propose a simple amendment.

If you look on page 10 of the Bill and look at section 92.1, you will see that under subsection (2) it says that "a person shall, before entering any land under subsection (1), give prior written notice." Okay? Prior written notice has to be given, but the problem is that there is no time period set out for how long the prior written notice should be. Is it reasonable for a farmer to receive notice at 10 minutes before 9 in the morning that an entry on his premises will take place 10 minutes later, at 9 o'clock? Is that reasonable, my friends? Is that reasonable for those of you who come from rural Alberta, from the agricultural sector where you might have constituents that have chicken coops, you might have constituents who raise pigs, or you might have constituents who are assisting their cattle and their animals of husbandry give birth? Is that reasonable, that you could give the farmer involved 10 minutes notice of an intention to enter his land to do a project of this magnitude?

Let us at least look at this amendment, which says 30 days: you must give the farmer affected at least 30 days notice. Is that so unreasonable, particularly, my friends, when the Act as drafted by the minister and her associates makes it clear: "unless it is impractical under the circumstances to do so." So if it's impractical to do so, you can even avoid giving notice, and that impracticality protection would also protect the board or the oil company for the 30-day notice. Is that unreasonable? How could anybody in this Legislative Assembly, notwithstanding the hour, vote against that section that gives farmers in Alberta at least 30 days notice?

DR. L. TAYLOR: Try us. Try us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is Cypress-Medicine Hat rising on a point of order?

DR. L. TAYLOR: No. Actually, I was just changing chairs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I thought I heard your voice. Sorry.

MR. GERMAIN: I indicated to the House Leader that I would be brief if I was not encouraged to expand my arguments, Mr. Chairman. So I conclude my submission on this particular amendment by saying: surely giving a farmer 30 days notice where it is practical to do so cannot be considered unreasonable. And, my friends, if you vote against this amendment, you might as well take an ad out in the *Edmonton Journal* that says: amendments, constructive criticism, careful and deliberate thought not welcome here.

I want to continue in my submission to cover the second aspect of this amendment, even though we will vote separately, with your permission, Mr. Chairman.

Now I want to take you down the section right on the page we're at, right on page 10, and I know you've all got this Bill out because I know that you consider these important amendments. I want to direct your attention to subsection (4), which is where the next amendment proposed fits. Now, what happens here is this. Think about what's happened here. A board has ordered an oil company to go in there and clean up a well, but surface rights are not protected. The board can order the oil company, and in fact it says that a person who enters to do the well cleanup shall compensate the landowner for the damage done during the cleanup. That's the minister's approach, and that's a fair and that's a right approach. The minister says: we're going to compensate you; the board is going to order that you be compensated.

So what do I say as an added amendment? I say let's put some teeth into it, because remember that these are people that have to be ordered – ordered – to go in and clean up. I say let's add one more power to the board. And what's the power that I want to give the board? The power that I propose in this amendment to give to the board is the power to order security for those cleanup costs to the farmer. What is wrong with that, rural Alberta? What is wrong with that in Brooks, Alberta? If some oil company is going onto a farmer's land to clean up an oil well, what is wrong with the board having the authority, my friends – the board has the authority; they don't have to order it – to order that the cleanup person may have to post security for the costs of the cleanup? Otherwise, what you have happen is that the board has all this power to order the cleanup, but the poor farmer has no power to get paid if the person doing the cleanup doesn't want to pay him or gets into a dispute or ends up with no money.

These two particular amendments do not offend the purpose, the approach, or the style of the Bill. They simply reach out and protect farmers in Alberta who may have abandoned wells on their property. Is there anybody in this Legislative Assembly that will say no to those farmers this evening? That's my submission.

11:00

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question has been called. We're considering in the first vote the amendment as moved by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray which we have entitled A8.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We are now going to move to consideration of amendment A9 as moved by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

[Motion carried]

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I would call for the question on Bill 5.

[Mr. Sohal in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills and reports the following: Bill 2 and Bill 5. I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 5 agreed to]

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 5 be reported.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[Motion carried]

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that the committee rise and report.

[At 11:05 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

